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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE OPERA ARIAS OF HANDEL

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is intended as an investigation of the form and content of Handel's opera arias. Although other aspects of Handel's operas are considered, the primary attention is placed upon the aria because it is the most important musical element in the genre of *opera seria*.

An adequate understanding of Handel's achievements as an opera composer is difficult without some knowledge of early eighteenth-century opera, and therefore, the first chapter consists of a brief survey of the *opera seria* convention—its libretti, its singers, and its music. The basic elements of *opera seria* are discussed separately, with special emphasis on the formal and stylistic evolution of the da capo aria as represented in the music of two of the foremost composers of *opera seria*—Alessandro Scarlatti and Johann Adolph Hasse.

A similar analytical approach is employed in the second chapter, which is a study of Handel's operas as seen through six representative works: *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*. These operas have been chosen because they represent Handel's two main periods of operatic activity: *Giulio Cesare* (1724), *Tamerlano* (1724), and *Rodelinda* (1725), were written during the middle of the first Royal Academy period, 1720-1728; and *Orlando* (1733), *Ariodante* (1735), and *Alcina* (1735), were written during the second Royal Academy period, 1729-1737. In addition, these six operas are perhaps the most





dramatically successful and least obscure of Handel's operas, and may someday enter the standard operatic repertoire. After a brief discussion of Handel's opera career, libretti, singers, and musical style, the musical elements of his operas are studied separately. From the background material contained in the first chapter, one can determine how closely Handel followed the operatic conventions of his day, and the ways in which he deviated from these conventions. A model of the typical Handelian da capo aria is established in order to compare this form with the da capo form of his contemporaries. The final section of this chapter examines Handel's dramatic manipulation of aria form, analysing the various techniques employed by the composer to enhance the dramatic action of his operas.

The third chapter concentrates on the emotional content in Handel's arias. His treatment of the Doctrine of the Affections is examined to establish the basic vocabulary employed by the composer to convey the emotional content of his arias to contemporary audiences. Finally, musical characterization is investigated. The portrayal of character through music, which is perhaps the most important and also the most elusive talent of a great opera composer, is evident in the operas of Handel. The author attempts to discover the techniques employed by the composer in the creation of the life-like characters which are found in his operas.



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## CHAPTER 1

### THE OPERA SERIA CONVENTION

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, a new type of opera was emerging from Italy which was to become the musical/dramatic form par excellence of the first half of the eighteenth century, not only in Italy, but throughout most of Europe. Although this new type of Italian heroic opera, or *opera seria*, has been regarded as the final phase of operatic decadence prior to the reforms of Gluck, it was in fact the product of a reform movement in itself. This reform movement was basically a literary one, because *opera seria* also evolved from the musical traditions and conventions of the composers and singers of the late seventeenth century.

#### The Libretto

##### Librettists and Libretto Reform

The beginnings of *opera seria* are traditionally traced back to the libretto reform initiated in Rome by the Arcadian Academy. The Arcadian Academy was an association of the *litterati* established during the late seventeenth century under the patronage of the former Queen of Sweden, Christina. The purpose of this Academy was to rescue Italian poetry and drama from its "baroque" extravagance and decadence by a return to the classical ideals of ancient Greeks and Romans. A similar movement had occurred in France during the middle of the seventeenth century under



the distinguished leadership of Nicolas Boileau, Pierre Corneille, and later Jean Racine. Unlike this French reform movement, which was aimed at the spoken theatre, in Italy the reform primarily effected opera, because at this time the opera libretto was the most important literary form.<sup>1</sup> These literati sought to purge the seventeenth-century opera libretto of its complicated plots and subplots, its abundance of characters, its illogical sequence of dramatic action, its lack of consistent characterization, its sensational exploitation of scenic effects, its coarse and extravagant language, its immoral tone, its superfluous arias, its comic scenes, and its haphazard mixture of comic and serious characters. Although the ideals of the Arcadian Academy were basically a negation of previous operatic practices, they did serve to establish literary standards and improve literary tastes, not only in Rome but throughout Italy.<sup>2</sup>

The poets Domenico David, Silvio Stampiglia, and Apostolo Zeno, who were members of the Academy, adopted many of these reforms in their libretti. By 1700 Giovanni Maria Crescimbeni, the president of the Arcadian Academy, could say that Italy had

corrected many manifestations of that monstrous mixing of character types practiced till now, managing at least to establish entirely serious libretti like those used today in the theaters of Venice, which do not use comic characters and which, by diminishing the excessive number of arias, allow some opportunity in the recitatives for the *affetti*. In this enterprise our fellow Arcadians the late Domenico David and the most learned Apostolo Zeno have been prime movers; and, therefore, the honour of the achievement is principally theirs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nathaniel Burt, "Opera in Arcadia," *Musical Quarterly* 41 (1955):145.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Robert Freeman, "Apostolo Zeno's Reform of the Libretto," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21 (1968):325.



However, these reforms were not as revolutionary as is often assumed. Recent research has shown that the libretti of Zeno and David are not radically different from most contemporary Venetian libretti, with regards to the exclusion of comic characters and the reduction in the number of arias.<sup>4</sup> By adopting these reforms, Zeno, David, and Stampiglia were merely at the forefront of a general literary trend that had spread from Rome throughout most of Italy. In addition, these librettists were not overzealous in their reforms, since they were writing for the public whose tastes had to be considered. For example, Zeno's *Griselda* contains a comic servant, while Stampiglia's *Partenope* has a comic *dénouement*. Although Zeno can no longer be credited with the reform of the opera libretto, "he was certainly among the most skillful" librettists of his generation. He succeeded in creating "rationalistic libretti, where characters were drawn in greater depth, and dramatic development was more logically motivated than it had been previously." In his libretti, especially those written for Emperor Charles VI in Vienna, Zeno achieved a high moral tone by concentrating "on questions of politics and royal ethics."<sup>5</sup>

The reforms of the Arcadians were continued by Pietro Metastasio, who appropriately succeeded Zeno as Imperial court poet at Vienna in 1730.<sup>6</sup> The libretti of Metastasio represent the *opera seria* libretto in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 326-27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 326 & 337; for additional information on Zeno and the reform of the opera libretto see Robert Schonfield Freeman, "Opera without Drama: Currents of Change in Italian Opera, 1675 to 1725, and the Roles Played Therein by Zeno, Caldara, and Others," vols. 1-2 (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Donald Jay Grout, *A Short History of Opera*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 185.



its most refined and perfect form. Unlike Zeno, who regarded opera as an inferior type of drama and barely tolerated musical settings of his works, Metastasio was sympathetic towards musicians and was himself an amateur composer. Metastasio once stated that "he was incapable of writing words to be sung unless he imagined the music for them."<sup>7</sup> Because of his knowledge of music and musicians, he achieved a greater union between the dramatic and lyrical elements by relating the aria text more closely to the recitative and by exploiting the musical qualities of the Italian language. Metastasio also developed a highly refined poetic style which caused him to be compared, during his lifetime, with Homer and Dante. His twenty-seven libretti were the most popular and influential of the eighteenth century, receiving more than one thousand musical settings.<sup>8</sup> Besides these celebrated authors, there were many other librettists throughout Europe of lesser talent. Most theatres employed their own librettists, usually literary hacks whose job was to reconstruct old libretti to resemble those of Metastasio, or to adapt new libretti to suit local tastes.

#### Structure of the Opera Seria Libretto

The standard libretto of Metastasio and Zeno consists of a straightforward plot, which is derived from Classical or Medieval history or from mythology, with one or two closely related subplots. The cast comprises six to eight characters arranged in a hierarchical order.

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<sup>7</sup>Michael F. Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 48.

<sup>8</sup>Grout, *History of Opera*, p. 185.





Because this type of opera was intended for the instruction and entertainment of European aristocracy, the characters are usually of noble rank, and the opera usually contains a moral lesson aimed at these princely patrons. The moral lesson usually extolls the importance of virtue, honour, clemency, fidelity, or bravery to a person of high position. The moral aim of *opera seria* causes the characters to remain idealized types or stereotypes rather than individuals.

The libretto was usually divided into three acts, with the third often shorter than the first. Each act consisted of a series of scenes that were determined by the movement of the characters on stage and not by place. The great majority of each scene was written in alternating seven- and eleven-syllable lines which were intended to be set as recitative.<sup>9</sup> The recitative was the domain of the librettist, because virtually all of the dramatic action was contained within it. The composer would provide a simple speech-like melody and a simple chordal accompaniment that would not impede, but rather would assist in the proper delivery of the text by the singer. At the end of most scenes, the librettist would write several shorter rhyming stanzas to be set as arias. The majority of these aria texts were written specifically in da capo form, consisting of two strophes of which the first was repeated at the end of the second. The aria text did not advance the drama but rather commented upon it. At this point in the scene, the drama would stop and one of the major characters would react to what had occurred in the recitative dialogue by expressing his emotions not to the characters

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<sup>9</sup>Hellmuth Christian Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," *Opera and Church Music 1630-1750*, ed. Anthony Lewis and Nigel Fortune, vol. 5 of *The New Oxford History of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 88.



on stage, but to himself and to the audience. The cessation of the dramatic action allowed the music to dominate over the drama. Most of the scenes had the same basic structure: dramatic action in the recitative leading to musical reaction in the aria. In this way a very equal union of music and drama was achieved. The rational eighteenth-century mind could not tolerate the irrational fusion of music and drama (which is the basis of opera), and so it separated the two basic elements and set them in alternation; the drama taking the lead in the recitatives, and the music taking the lead in the arias.<sup>10</sup> Only in the accompanied recitative, which was reserved for particularly intense scenes, did the music and drama unite to create a climax.

The convention of placing an exit aria at the end of a scene of recitative is one of the most characteristic features of *opera seria*. Although few eighteenth-century writers speak of this convention, a passage from Giuseppe Salvadori's *Poetica toscana all'uso* from 1691 seems to indicate that it may have been established at this early date by the librettists for aesthetic reasons: "Arias can be put at the beginning of scenes, but recitative is better in that position. This arrangement will make the aria more agreeable."<sup>11</sup> The peculiar scene structure of *opera seria* was probably responsible for making this position of the aria so favorable. The dramatic tension of the recitative continually increases until it is released in the aria. After this emotional outburst or climax, it was no longer necessary or desirable for the

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<sup>10</sup>Grout, *History of Opera*, pp. 186-87.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, pp. 55-56.



character to remain on stage because his presence created a sense of anticlimax.<sup>12</sup> With the character off stage, the librettist could once again build up the dramatic tension. This convention was established by Zeno, who differentiated between exit arias at the end of scenes (*ingressi*) and entrance arias at the beginning of scenes (*escite*). The *ingressi* were the most common and most important arias, and their function was considered equivalent to the chorus in Greek tragedy.<sup>13</sup> By the 1720's and 1730's this convention became so standardized that almost every aria was followed by an exit. For example, in Metastasio's *Artaserse* (1730), as set by Hasse, all of the arias are placed at the end of scenes of recitative and are followed by an exit, the only exception being an arietta at the beginning of Act III.<sup>14</sup> While the exit convention was often dramatically effective, it could on occasion become quite ludicrous, as Benedetto Marcello satirically describes in his advice to the librettist in *Il teatro alla moda*:

One rule of prime importance is never to let a character make his exit before he has sung the usual canzonetta. This is especially appropriate if it immediately precedes that person's execution, suicide, or taking of poison.<sup>15</sup>

It required talent and ingenuity on the part of the librettist to build up the dramatic tension in the recitative, and then to artificially

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>13</sup>Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," p. 88.

<sup>14</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>15</sup>Benedetto Marcello, "*Il Teatro Alla Moda*" (Venice, ca. 1720), trans. Reinhard G. Pauly, *Musical Quarterly* 34 (1948):376.



suspend it and introduce some type of appropriate commentary. In addition, it was necessary that these commentaries be of a different character from each other to allow for musical contrast. Metastasio was a master at creating numerous and varied situations in which the aria could be introduced smoothly with the appropriate commentary and exit. Many of these aria situations became standardized and reappeared again in the libretti that were arranged, compiled, or written by the numerous librettists employed by the opera theatres throughout Europe. From a musical standpoint, a good libretto did not necessarily require excellent poetry, but numerous and varied aria situations that would allow the composer to employ the Doctrine of the Affections to its greatest advantage.

Often in the aria texts, Zeno and Metastasio have the characters compare themselves, or their situations, to some type of natural phenomena. These literary conceits, which seem so ridiculous to the twentieth century, were popular because they allowed the librettist an easy opportunity to write an aria text when the dramatic situation did not lend itself to lyrical contemplation. For this reason the simile aria was often misused, especially by the librettists of lesser talents. The abuse of the simile aria was satirized by Marcello in *Il teatro alla moda*:

The aria must in no way be related to the preceding recitative but it should be full of such things as sweet little butterflies, bouquets, nightingales, quails, little boats, little huts, jasmine, violets, . . . tigers, lions, whales, crabs, turkeys, cold capon, etc. Thus the poet will demonstrate to the world his proficiency as a natural scientist.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 36:86.





Vivaldi's setting of Braccioli's *Orlando* is particularly rich in this type of aria and demonstrates that Marcello was not exaggerating the extent of this abuse. For example, Alcina compares the effects of her new love to that of the sunshine upon the roses and violets, Orlando compares the argument between Ruggiero and Bradamante to a storm at sea, Bradamante compares her joy to a flooded stream overflowing its waters into the nearby fields, Medoro compares his love for Angelica to the innocent meadow flower, and Angelica compares her absence from Medoro to a dying flower severed from its roots by a plough.

### The Singers

The role of the singer in the evolution of *opera seria* is a very important one, although it is sometimes exaggerated. The first half of the eighteenth century was the great age of singers, and *opera seria* became the vehicle for the display of their talents, in spite of the reforms of the librettists. The star system was not new to the eighteenth century; it began with the opening of the first opera houses in Venice during the mid-seventeenth century. At this time, the great stars were the castrati, who took not only the main male rôles, but sometimes the female rôles as well.<sup>17</sup> Their unnatural voices, which combined the register, range, and agility of the female voice and the strength of the male voice, came to be associated by the eighteenth-century mind with heroic youth, while the natural male voices were associated with old age.<sup>18</sup> The castrati continued in their popularity

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<sup>17</sup>Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1959), pp. 54-55.

<sup>18</sup>Winton Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 210.



throughout the eighteenth century, although they now shared the lime-light with the famous *prime donne*.<sup>19</sup> During the first half of the eighteenth century, when *opera seria* was flourishing throughout Europe, Italy was producing singers whose talents have probably never before or since been equalled. Legendary singers such as the castrati Nicolini, Farinelli, and Senesino and the sopranos Santa Stella, Cuzzoni, and Faustina could often be heard singing at the same theatres; for example, between 1734 to 1737, Senesino, Farinelli, and Cuzzoni were employed by London's Opera of the Nobility. In the eyes of the public, the singers were as important, if not more important, as the composers and librettists of *opera seria*. In London, where composers were held in comparatively high esteem, the singing of Senesino, Cuzzoni, and Faustina was as much of a drawing card as was the music of Handel and Bononcini.

Because of their great popularity, the singers had a considerable amount of power and prestige. The great singers were paid enormous salaries while the composers would receive "less pay than the least of them."<sup>20</sup> For example, when the opera *Siface* was produced in Bologna in 1737, the castrato, Carestini, received 2,880 lire, the tenor, Amorevoli, received 1,500 lire, while the composer, Leonardo Leo, received 1,575 lire.<sup>21</sup> The prestigious position of the singers allowed them to enjoy a far greater share in the creation and the production of

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<sup>19</sup>Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>20</sup>Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*, 34:384.

<sup>21</sup>Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera*, p. 68.



opera than in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the first stage of creation, the composer and often the librettist would compose each role with a particular singer in mind, adapting the music and the words to suit the individual characteristics of the singer's voice. When the score was complete, the singers could have both the libretto and the music changed if they were not satisfied with their role:

Whenever someone complains to him [the impresario] about his or her role he will give an immediate order to the poet and to the composer to adjust the opera to the satisfaction of the complainer.<sup>22</sup>

Then in the actual staging of the opera, the performance practice of the time allowed the singer to complete the composer's abstract score by the addition of numerous ornaments and variations to the vocal line.

#### The Influence of the Singers Upon the Form of Opera Seria

Because many of the characteristic features of *opera seria* commended themselves so well to the virtuoso exploits of the great singers, these features were standardized with great regularity. The da capo aria was standardized because its three-part form allowed the singers opportunities for cadenzas at the end of each section, and the da capo allowed them to demonstrate to the audience their expertise in embellishing a melody on its repeat. Pietro Francesco Tosi in his *Opinioni de'cantori* (1723) explains the rationale behind the ornamentation of the da capo aria:

In the first they require nothing but the simplest Ornaments, of a good Taste and few, that the Composition may remain simple, plain, and pure; in the second they expect, that to this Purity some artful Graces be added, by which the Judicious may hear, that the Ability

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<sup>22</sup>Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*, 35:86.



of the Singer is greater; and, in repeating the *Air*, he that does not vary it for the better, is no great Master.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, each aria would contain several coloratura passages on important or sonorous words, often tailored by the composer to display the talents of a particular singer. These coloratura passages were both a concession to the virtuosity of the singer, and a device used by composers for the expansion of the da capo form; as the da capo aria form increased in size, so too did the length and complexity of the coloratura passages. Likewise, the exit convention was probably standardized because it allowed the singer to exit amid the applause of the audience, and to take a rest before his next aria.

#### Abuses by the Singers

Singers of the eighteenth century were renowned for their vanity, their jealousy, and their overt concern for protocol. The hierarchical arrangement of the characters in the *opera seria* libretto not only conformed to the classical ideals of symmetry and balance which were so important to Zeno and the Arcadians, but also helped to appease the protocol-conscious singers. Most libretti were written for a specific theatre and cast, and librettists allotted the roles in the opera according to the talents of the singers. Not only was it required that the most talented singers have the most important roles and the greatest number of arias, but the arias should be shared between these superior singers regardless of the dramatic needs. The superior singers invariably included a *prima donna*, soprano, and a *primo uomo*, castrato, who

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<sup>23</sup>Pietro Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song; or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, English ed. (London: J. Wilcox, 1742), pp. 93-94.





were often supported and balanced by a second couple, the *seconda donna* and *secondo uomo* who were usually a soprano and a castrato as well. The *ultime parti*, or cadet singers, who were often altos, tenors, or basses, received the minor roles and the least number of arias.

This hierarchical arrangement of singers and arias is a unique feature of *opera seria*, and is described by the playwright and librettist Carlo Goldoni in his *Memoires*:

The three principle personages of the drama ought to sing five airs each: two in the first act, two in the second, and one in the third. The second actress and second soprano can only have three, and the inferior characters must be satisfied with a single air each or two at most.<sup>24</sup>

Although numerous similar arrangements were possible, depending upon the individual cast, theatre, and libretto, this would seem to be a fairly accurate description of a typical *opera seria* from the middle eighteenth century, when the great length of the arias caused a reduction in the number of arias in most operas. During the 1720's and 1730's, when there were generally more arias in a given opera, each singer would have one or two additional arias. For example, Porpora's setting of *Ifigenia* (1735) contains the following arrangement:<sup>25</sup>

Figure 1. Arrangement of arias in Porpora's *Ifigenia*.

<i>Primo uomo</i> --Farinelli	five arias	(2, 2, 1)
<i>Prima donna</i> --Cuzzoni	six arias	(2, 2, 2)
<i>Secondo uomo</i> --Senesino	four arias	(2, 1, 1)
<i>Seconda donna</i> --Bertolli	three arias	(1, 1, 1)
<i>Basso</i> --Montagnana	three arias	(1, 1, 1)
<i>Ultime parti</i> --Segatti	two arias	(1, 1, 0)

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<sup>24</sup>Carlo Goldoni, *Memoires of Carlo Goldoni*, trans. John Black, ed. with introduction by William A. Drake (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 124.

<sup>25</sup>Michael F. Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London, 1733-1736," *Soundings* 2 (1971-72):65.



Another arrangement which prevented rivalry among the singers was the division of the arias equally between the superior singers; for example, the six main singers in Hasse's *L'Olympiade* each received four arias, while the five main singers in Hasse's *Artaserse* received five arias each.<sup>26</sup>

During the second phase of *opera seria*, when the arias were categorized into aria types, the superior singers were required to have one of each type of aria. In addition, no two arias of the same type, or two arias by the same singer were to follow in succession.<sup>27</sup> This convention is also described by Goldoni in his *Memoires*:

The author of the words must . . . take care that two pathetic airs do not succeed one another. He must distribute with the same precaution the bravura airs, the airs of action, the inferior airs, and the minuets and rondeaus.

He must, above all things, avoid giving impassioned airs, bravura airs, or rondeaus to inferior characters.<sup>28</sup>

The *prima donna* and the *primo uomo* expected their arias to be of a higher musical quality than those of the cadet singers; as Marcello said, "The composer-conductor must see to it that the best arias are always given to the *prima donna*."<sup>29</sup> Such conventions greatly hindered the composer from creating any consistent musical characterization.

The star system contained many more abuses which further interfered with the intentions of the composer and librettist, providing they

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<sup>26</sup>Patricia E. Wilson, "*L'Olimpiade* of Johann Adolph Hasse" (Master's Thesis, University of Alberta, 1975), pp. 75-79; and Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>27</sup>Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," p. 88.

<sup>28</sup>Goldoni, *Memoires of Carlo Goldoni*, p. 124.

<sup>29</sup>Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*, 34:387.



had any intentions other than public success. Although Faustina and Senesino were renowned for their acting abilities, and Farinelli for his good manners, most singers were infamous for their bad acting and bad manners on stage. Marcello brilliantly satirized these faults throughout his *Il teatro alla moda*:

The *prima donna* should not pay the least bit of attention to the *seconda donna*, nor should the *seconda* to the *terza*, and so forth. If they are on the stage together they must never listen to one another, and while one sings an aria the other should retire to the wings, accept some snuff from her protector, blow her nose, or examine herself in the mirror.

. . . . .  
In arias and recitatives of action she will do well to employ the same stock gestures every night, to move her head and fan in exactly the same way, and to blow her nose always at the same moment, displaying a beautiful handkerchief . . . .

If the part of the *cantatrice* requires her to have some other character put in chains while she is singing an aria addressed to him expressing disdain or fury, she should use the preceding ritornello to chat with her victim, to giggle and to point out to him some friends in one of the boxes.

. . . . .  
She should know from memory everyone else's part, better than her own, and should sing it along during the performance. She should not fail to disturb everyone else as much as possible, while they are singing, at which time she can also amuse herself with the bear or with some extra, making much noise all the time.<sup>30</sup>

The performance practice of improvised ornamentation was also abused, as Marcello described:

When he [the castrato] reaches the repeat of the *da capo* aria he should change it completely in any way he pleases, regardless of whether or not these changes will go with the accompaniment of bass or violins, and whether they will distort the tempo entirely.<sup>31</sup>

These abuses, however, were allowed by the composers, librettists, impresarios, and the public because they were an integral part of *opera seria*.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 34:400, 402 & 403.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 34:390.



The great importance of the singer was guaranteed as long as the aria remained the musical focal point of *opera seria*. Therefore, the popular success of an opera was often more dependent upon the quality of the cast than upon the quality of the music.

### The Music

#### Baroque Opera Seria

It would be misleading to consider that the librettists were solely responsible for the creation of this new type of opera. The two most characteristic features of *opera seria*, the strict numbers structure consisting of alternating recitative and aria, and the form and style of the da capo aria and simple recitative, were not the innovations of the librettists. By adopting these musical forms in their libretti they were merely following, and in turn perpetuating, the common practices of most progressive composers of Italian opera. In the late operas and cantatas of Francesco Cavalli, Pietro Antonio Cesti, and Alessandro Stradella, the fluid musical/dramatic structures of the early Baroque *drama per musica* solidified into a distinctive numbers' structure. The arioso sections became longer, more melodic, and more structured, and were sometimes provided with orchestral accompaniments; the monodic sections lost many of their expressive harmonies and melodies and were sung at a faster tempo, while retaining continuo accompaniment. By the late 1690's, composers of the next generation, such as Alessandro Scarlatti, Francesco Gasparini, Agostino Steffani, and Giovanni and Marc Antonio Bononcini developed this numbers structure into a regular alternation of da capo aria and simple recitative.





Therefore, the musical development of *opera seria* should be seen as a continuation of the traditions of seventeenth-century opera, and not as a break with the traditions, as was the libretto reform. Many operas of this period, especially those of Scarlatti and Steffani retain elements from seventeenth-century opera, in part conditioned by the seventeenth-century libretti they often set. Some historians regard this period as the culmination of seventeenth-century opera, reserving the term *opera seria* for later operas based on Metastasian libretti.<sup>32</sup> While this terminology has certain advantages, from a musical and formal standpoint the operas of this period look and sound like *opera seria* because of their regular alternation of da capo aria and simple recitative. This author chooses to use the term *opera seria* in its broader sense, in order to avoid coining a new term for the opera of the early eighteenth century.

The opera composers of Scarlatti's generation established *opera seria* as the international operatic style for almost all of Europe, with the exception of France. Italian composers were to be found in most of Europe's important musical centres: Antonio Caldara and Francesco Conti in Vienna, Agostino Steffani in Munich, Attilio Ariosti in Berlin, Antonio Lotti in Dresden, and Giovanni Bononcini and Nicola Porpora in London. Foreign composers, such as the Germans George Frideric Handel, Johann Josef Fux, and (later) Karl Heinrich Graun and Johann Adolph Hasse also came under the spell of *opera seria*, and adopted this

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<sup>32</sup> See Grout, *History of Opera*, chapters 13 & 14.



international genre and style as their own in order to achieve fame and fortune.<sup>33</sup>

### The Doctrine of the Affections

In *opera seria*, the composer's most important role was to depict and sustain through the music the emotion expressed in the aria text. Just as the characters were generalized or stereotyped, so were the emotions expressed in the contemplative aria texts. In keeping with the objectivity and rationality of the eighteenth century, human emotions were categorized according to a rigid system known as the Doctrine of the Affections. Each aria was to express a single emotional state or affect, which was determined by the previous action (recitative). These affects were fixed and static, and could not be readily altered by combining them together or by setting them in opposition. Thus any type of realistic representation of human emotion, with its delicate feeling, continuity, complexity and individuality, was very difficult. During the aria, the character ceased to be an individual and became a symbol of a particular affection.

The Doctrine of the Affections provided the composer with a set of principles; in essence the basic premise of this doctrine was simply that contrasting emotions are depicted by contrasting musical styles.<sup>34</sup> From this basic premise, elaborate theories were formulated, the most famous being those of Johann Mattheson, Handel's friend and colleague.

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<sup>33</sup>For a more detailed description of this development, see Grout, *History of Opera*, chapters 5, 9 & 13; Wolff, "Italian Opera from the Later Monteverdi to Scarlatti," chapter 1 of *Opera and Church Music 1630-1750*; and Simon Towneley Worsthorne, *Venetian Opera in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

<sup>34</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 89.



Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739) was intended as a handbook to instruct composers on "how the emotions can be expressed in music so that they arouse corresponding emotions in the listener."<sup>35</sup>

Mattheson, like many of his contemporaries, believed that music was a highly expressive, non-abstract art, whose powers of communication were equal to those of language. Because of this belief, Mattheson, following the theories of Descartes and other seventeenth-century writers, did not hesitate to apply the rules of rhetoric to music.<sup>36</sup> For example, he explains how punctuation can be rendered musically through the various types of cadences, and how the da capo aria can be analyzed and constructed according to the six parts of good rhetorical speech.<sup>37</sup>

Some of Mattheson's theories are merely naive speculation; for example, the gigue expresses four different emotions "anger or eagerness, pride, simple-minded desirousness, and flightiness," and the allemande "represents a contented or *happy* spirit which takes pleasure in calm and order."<sup>38</sup> However, many of his theories are valid for they are based upon the common practice of contemporary composers. For example, joy, which "is an *expansion* of our vital spirits," is depicted by "large and expanded intervals" and fast tempos, while sadness, which "is a

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<sup>35</sup>Hans Lenneberg, "Johann Mattheson on Affect and Rhetoric in Music," *Journal of Music Theory* 2 (1958):47.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>37</sup>Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, selected portions trans. Hans Lenneberg in "Johann Mattheson on Affect and Rhetoric in Music," *Journal of Music Theory* 2 (1958):47-84 and 193-236.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62 & 67.



*contradiction* of those same subtle parts of our bodies," is best expressed by "the narrowest intervals" and *Adagio* tempo; hope is depicted by "the loveliest conduct of melody and the sweetest combination of sounds in the world" and *Andante* tempo, while despair is depicted by "the strangest extremes of sound" and "the strangest, wildly disordered sequence of notes."<sup>39</sup> In this way, Mattheson classified the various emotions and illustrated the means to express them in music. Although the Doctrine of the Affections was often misused, making composition a dry craft of using the right formula at the right time, in the hands of the great masters such as Handel or Bach, the Doctrine provided a technique by which the basic emotion of the music could be enhanced and at the same time made more tangible and expressive to the listener.

### Pre-Classical Opera Seria

During the 1730's, *opera seria* entered a second phase. Although the form remained basically the same, progressive composers at this time were developing a new musical style. The late Baroque style of Scarlatti and Handel was succeeded by the Pre-Classical style of composers such as Leonardo Leo, Leonardo Vinci, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, and Johann Adolph Hasse. Because this new style was developed primarily by these Neapolitan composers, the term "Neapolitan opera" has traditionally been used to describe this type of *opera seria*. Charles Burney singles out Leonardo Vinci as the great innovator of this new style:

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 51, 52 & 56.





The vocal compositions of Vinci form an aera in dramatic Music, as he was the first among his countrymen, who, since the invention of recitative by Jacapo Peri, in 1600, seems to have occasioned any considerable revolution in the musical drama. . . . Vinci seems to have been the first opera composer who . . . rendered it [music] the friend, though not the slave to poetry, by simplifying and polishing melody, and calling the attention of the audience chiefly to the voice-part, by disintangling it from fugue, complication, and laboured contrivance.<sup>40</sup>

Although recent research seems to indicate that the Neapolitan style was also developed by certain Venetian composers such as Antonio Vivaldi, Burney's remarks on Vinci serve as an accurate summary of this new style.<sup>41</sup> While melody is certainly an important element in the music of Scarlatti and Handel, with the avant-garde composers, melody becomes all important; the lower voices function merely as harmonic support to this melody, and no trace is left of the equal balance between harmony and counterpoint (Burney's reference to fugue) found in the music of Scarlatti and Handel. Because of the inactivity of the lower voices, the rate of chordal change becomes much slower, and the harmonies become more diatonic than in the Baroque style. This new melodic style is characterized by its abundance of written-out ornaments and appoggiaturas, feminine cadences, lombard rhythms, syncopations, regular periodic structure and overall lilting quality.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music: From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (1789), ed. Frank Mercer (New York: Dover Publications, 1935) 2:916-17.

<sup>41</sup> Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," pp. 108-110.

<sup>42</sup> For a more detailed description of this development, see Grout, *History of Opera*, chapter 14; Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, pp. 107-159; and Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750."



### Musical Standardization

While the form of *opera seria* remained the same, this stylistic change brought with it a high degree of musical standardization. This standardization is evident in most aspects of *opera seria* at this time, including the choice of key, tempo, and metre within the arias. During the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the major mode became very popular, and most operas contained only two or three arias in the minor mode. The keys used in these minor-mode arias were also restricted: usually G and C and sometimes D and F minor.<sup>43</sup> For example, only two of the twenty-six arias from Hasse's *L'Olimpiade* are in the minor mode--G and C minor.<sup>44</sup> However, arias in the major mode sometimes contained modulations to the tonic minor which, in some way, compensated for this restriction. Coupled with this preference for the major mode, composers during this period also favored fast tempos. For example, Hasse's *L'Olimpiade* contains only one slow movement, the duet (marked *Largo ma non troppo*), and even it contains a contrasting *Allegretto* middle section. Because of the heroic nature of *opera seria*, composers avoided certain metres that were associated with popular music. Compound metres, such as 12/8 of the siciliano and the 6/8 of the gigue, which were frequently used by Scarlatti and Handel, were seldom employed except for occasional pastoral scenes. The great majority of the arias were written in 4/4 or 2/4 time. For example, sixteen of the twenty-six arias in Hasse's *L'Olimpiade* are in either 4/4 or 2/4 metre; the

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<sup>43</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup>Wilson, "L'Olimpiade of Johann Adolph Hasse," pp. 75-79.



remainder are in either 3/8 or 3/4, with the exception of one pastoral aria in 9/8 metre.

For some reason the 4/4 allegro was thought suggestive of the heroic pose suitable for a prince. This time permitted a style with a strong, though uncomplicated, rhythmic emphasis. . . . It allowed among other things for fast vocalizations. . . .<sup>45</sup>

Nowhere is this musical standardization more apparent than in the classification of the arias of *opera seria* into four or five basic types. During this second phase of *opera seria*, the Doctrine of the Affections became so standardized and hackneyed that many composers no longer sought for inspiration in the aria text and the dramatic action, but merely wrote a certain type of aria for a certain type of situation. Carlo Goldoni in his *Commedie* and John Brown in his *Letters upon the Poetry and Music of the Italian Opera* divide the arias into the following categories:<sup>46</sup>

Figure 2. Aria types in *opera seria* according to Goldoni and Brown.

1. *Aria patetica* (Goldoni) or *aria cantabile* (Brown)--simple lyrical songs to express tenderness or sorrow.
2. *Aria brillante* (Goldoni) or *aria di portamento* (Brown)--arias with long sustained notes to express sentiments of dignity, and to display the beauty of the voice.
3. *Aria di mezzo carattere*--a serious yet pleasing aria to express sentiments between the tenderness of the first and the dignity of the second.
4. *Aria parlante*--arias in a fast agitated style to express violence or passion.
5. *Aria di bravura*--coloratura arias to show off the technique of the singer.

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<sup>45</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>46</sup>Carlo Goldoni, *Commedie*, 16 vols. (Venice: Pasquali, 1761), 11:6; and John Brown, *Letters upon the Poetry and Music of the Italian Opera* (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1789), pp. 35-39.



Although some writers, such as Brown, admit that there were many composers who were not aware of these categories, that they were recognized by contemporaries indicates that the arias at this period had become stereotyped to a certain extent.

This musical standardization gives most operas of this period a greater degree of uniformity than earlier opera had. Composers were not interested in developing new forms or individual styles, but in copying the latest operatic styles coming out of Italy, in order to ensure popular success. These new musical styles were simple and easy to imitate. Thus it is often less difficult to determine the date of an unknown opera, than to determine its composer. Stefano Arteaga in his *Delle rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano* (1785) complains that too many arias in contemporary opera sounded the same, and that they were being used to depict "passions so different one from the other."<sup>47</sup> This uniformity allowed composers to incorporate themes and entire arias of other composers into their own operas without anyone detecting these plagiarisms.

The peculiar structure of *opera seria* discouraged musical unity. From a musical standpoint, each scene was a complete and independent unit consisting of an introductory recitative leading to an aria which is based on a single affection. Thus, musical unity was relegated to the single aria; the only relationship between the arias was that of their position within the literary framework of the libretto. Donald J. Grout finds an interesting parallel between *opera seria* and eighteenth-

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<sup>47</sup>Quoted in Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, 128.





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century philosophy: "The arias were like Leibniz's monads, each closed off from the others, and all held together only by the 'preestablished harmony' of the libretto."<sup>48</sup> This lack of unity gave *opera seria* a loose, haphazard musical structure. Arias could be added or taken away without greatly altering the overall musical structure of the opera. A composer could take arias from an old opera, which need not be his own, and add them to a new opera, or add new arias to an old opera. For example, Scarlatti borrowed three arias and a sinfonia from *Cambise* (1719) and one aria from *Telemaco* (1718) in his opera *Marco Attilio Regolo*.<sup>49</sup> These additions were often necessary during the normal run of an opera in order to satisfy the whims of the singers, and the audience's love for novelty. When these additions and deletions were taken to extremes, a *pasticcio* resulted. This could be a collaboration, such as the famous *Muzio Scevola* (1721) in which Filippo Amadei provided the music for Act I, Giovanni Bononcini for Act II, and Handel for Act III; but most often the *pasticcio* was a haphazard mixture of various librettists and composers arranged by a composer or impresario without any concern for artistic unity. For example, a version of Stampiglia's *Turno Aricino* was produced in Naples in 1724 which included arias by Albinoni, Cappelli, Gasparini, Giacomelli, Leo, Lotti, Orlandini, Porpora, Porta, Scarlatti, Vinci, and Vivaldi, and recitatives by Leo and Vinci.<sup>50</sup> Because of this lack of unity, the various musical elements of *opera seria* conveniently lend themselves to separate discussion.

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<sup>48</sup>Grout, *History of Opera*, p. 190.

<sup>49</sup>Carl Reginald Morey, "The Late Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1965), pp. 129-31.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 143.



## The Recitative

By the late seventeenth century, composers had developed a new type of recitative which allowed large portions of the dialogue to be presented in a rapid but clear manner approximating speech. Contemporaries called this type of recitative *recitativo semplice*, or simple recitative, because of its continuo accompaniment. This recitative is characterized by its syllabic declamatory melody consisting of

many repeated notes, stepwise melodic motion, or small skips outlining the harmony of the accompaniment, in irregular phrase lengths punctuated by frequent rests, and all within a range seldom exceeding an octave.<sup>51</sup>

The continuo provided this melody with a simple chordal accompaniment upon a slow-moving *détaché* bass line. Simple recitative is never contained within a single tonality, but continually modulates to reflect the tensions of the drama.<sup>52</sup> Form is relegated to setting off large sections of the recitative by prominent broken cadences in which the voice finishes, usually with an appoggiatura leap downward of a third or a fourth before the cadential chords of the continuo.<sup>53</sup> Although notated in 4/4 time, simple recitative was sung in a free style, and singers were at liberty to change both the rhythm and melody as long as the harmonies remained the same.

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<sup>51</sup>Edward O.D. Downes, "Secco Recitative in Early Classical Opera Seria," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (1961):52.

<sup>52</sup>See the fifteen ground-rules of recitative from Johann Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (Leipzig, 1771-74) quoted in Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>53</sup>See Sven Hostrup Hansell, "The Cadence in Eighteenth-Century Recitative," *Musical Quarterly* 54 (1968):228-48.



Simple recitative was, at least during the early eighteenth century, not as perfunctory as it is often assumed to have been. Not only was the recitative intensified by the varied delivery of the singer, but composers at this time occasionally retained certain elements from seventeenth-century recitative, such as chromatic harmonies and melodies, expressive melismas, and measured arioso passages. For example, all of Scarlatti's operas contain several arioso passages within the recitatives, although there are fewer of them in the later operas, while Steffani makes extensive use of expressive or virtuosio melismas in the recitatives of *Tassilone* (1709).<sup>54</sup>

Although simple recitative remained basically the same, as the century progressed, it became more functional and less expressive. All vestiges of seventeenth-century recitative, such as the lyrical arioso passages and chromaticism were banished as being crude and barbarous. Simple recitative at this time abounded in harmonic and melodic clichés, many of which had specific rhetorical functions. The term *secco* recitative, which was probably coined during the nineteenth century to refer to a dry outmoded type of recitative, is anachronistic, but it is descriptive of the simple recitative of the middle eighteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Even most contemporary audiences found it dull, and paid little attention to it. Tosi regarded it as "that tedious chanting which offends the ear," while De Brosse played chess in the theatre in order to "fill the vacuum of these long recitatives."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Morey, "Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti," pp. 164-66.

<sup>55</sup>Downes, "Secco Recitative," pp. 50-51.

<sup>56</sup>Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, pp. 74-75; and Charles De Brosse, *Lettres familières écrites d'Italie en 1739 et 1740*, quoted in Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 72.



The composers of Scarlatti's generation were also responsible for the development of the accompanied recitative (*recitativo accompagnato* or *obbligato*) as an alternative to simple recitative. The accompanied recitative was usually reserved for scenes of intense drama, such as soliloquies, monologues, and pronouncements. While the vocal melody retains the declamatory style of simple recitative, it is intensified by the orchestral accompaniment which often exploits dissonant harmonies and bold modulations. The orchestra provides a sustained or punctuated chordal accompaniment for the voice, and sometimes descriptive figuration between the vocal phrases that depicts the meaning and mood of the text. Occasionally, measured arioso passages with orchestral accompaniment are inserted into the recitative to introduce the contrasting element of lyricism. Brown's description of the use of the arioso passages in accompanied recitative illustrates how effectively the music could mirror the drama in the *recitativo accompagnato*:

Often, in the middle of a very agitated Recitative, on the occurrence of some tender idea, on which the mind is supposed to dwell with a kind of melancholy pleasure, the music loses, by degrees, the irregular character of Recitative, and resolves gradually into the even measure and continued melody of Air--then, on a sudden, at the call of some idea of an opposite nature, breaks off again into its former irregularity.<sup>57</sup>

Although the accompanied recitative can be found in certain seventeenth-century operas, (Cavalli's *L'Ormindo* Act III from 1644 contains an early example), it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that it became a standard ingredient of Italian opera. For example, all of Scarlatti's late operas from *Il Mitridate Eupatore* (1707) to *Arminio*

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<sup>57</sup>Brown, *Letters*, pp. 21-22.





(1722) contain at least one accompanied recitative, while in the earlier operas, the *accompagnato* is found only sporadically.<sup>58</sup>

Many composers during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, such as Hasse, Graun, and Porpora, made greater use of the accompanied recitative. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the average number of accompanied recitatives in most operas was one or two, increasing to three or four by mid-century.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the reason for this restraint is explained by Metastasio in a letter to Hasse regarding his setting of *Attilio Regolo* (1747).<sup>60</sup> Metastasio believed that, if over-used, the accompanied recitative would lose its powerful effect and would slow down the drama. Although Hasse generally followed Metastasio's advice and limited the accompanied recitatives to four or five in each opera, he gave them greater importance by increasing their length and by allotting a more active role to the orchestra. For example, Griselda's accompanied recitative "Mio Re, mio Nume" from Act III of Scarlatti's *Griselda* (1721) is twenty-seven measures long, while Megacle's "Che Intesi eterni dei" from Act I of Hasse's *L'Olimpiade* (1756) is fifty-six measures long.<sup>61</sup> Porpora, on the other hand, greatly increased the number of accompanied recitatives in his operas; for

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<sup>58</sup>Morey, "Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti," p. 166.

<sup>59</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 85.

<sup>60</sup>Charles Burney, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio: in Which Are Incorporated Translations of his Principal Letters*, reprint ed., 3 vols. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), pp. 321-28.

<sup>61</sup>The latter is transcribed in Wilson, "*L'Olimpiade* of Johann Adolph Hasse," pp. 82-83.



example, Porpora's five London operas contain forty-four accompanied recitatives: *Arianna* (1733) has ten, *Enea* (1734) eleven, *Polifemo* (1735) thirteen, *Ifigenia* (1735) four, and *Mitridate* (1736) six.<sup>62</sup>

### The Da Capo Aria

Although the three-part da capo aria had been used frequently by earlier composers, in the operas of Scarlatti and his contemporaries, it assumed its position as the predominant aria form. The da capo aria provided composers with a balanced symmetrical form in which music could expand in a free but organized manner according to musical rather than dramatic principles. The popularity of this form was such that in many operas of the period the da capo aria is the exclusive aria form; for example all forty-one arias and ensembles in Scarlatti's *Griselda* are in da capo form. Like most aspects of *opera seria*, the form of the da capo aria was highly standardized with regard to key scheme, text-setting, coloratura, and the relationship between the voice and the orchestra. Although the da capo aria evolved during the first half of the eighteenth century, this process of evolution consisted of the overall expansion of the da capo form and the standardization of certain predominant features of that form into a stereotyped formula. This process of formal expansion and standardization can be observed by comparing the arias of two operas which are representative of *opera seria* during its early

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<sup>62</sup>Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," p. 71.



and late stages: Alessandro Scarlatti's *Griselda* from 1721 and Johann Adolf Hasse's *Arminio* from 1745.<sup>63</sup>

The da capo aria usually begins with a ritornello for orchestra or continuo which serves as an introduction for the singer. During the second quarter of the eighteenth century, it became almost mandatory for the da capo aria to begin with an orchestral ritornello. For example, while only twenty-seven of the forty-one da capo arias and ensembles in *Griselda* begin with ritornellos, all twenty-three da capo arias in *Arminio* begin with extensive ritornellos for orchestra. Besides serving as an introduction, the opening ritornello usually presents the main theme or motives which will be taken up by the singer. Although this type of thematic ritornello is occasionally found in the arias of Scarlatti (as in six of the twenty-seven arias with orchestral ritornellos in *Griselda*), the orchestra is often given material independent from the voice. This may reflect the influence of seventeenth-century opera in which the ritornello was often an independent piece separate from the aria. By the time of Hasse and his contemporaries, the thematic opening ritornello became the norm (as is the case in twenty of the twenty-three da capo arias in Hasse's *Arminio*). One of the main reasons for the expansion of the da capo aria during the second half of the eighteenth century was the increased length of the orchestral ritornellos,

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<sup>63</sup> Alessandro Scarlatti, *Griselda*, ed. Donald Jay Grout, vol. 3 of The Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti, general ed. Donald Jay Grout (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); and Johann Adolf Hasse, *Arminio*, ed. Rudolf Gerber, vols. 27 & 28 of Das Erbe Deutscher Musik (Mainz: Verlag B. Schott's Söhne, 1957).



especially the introductory ones. While the opening ritornellos in the arias of Scarlatti seldom exceed ten measures, those in the arias of Hasse often exceed thirty measures. The ritornello usually remains in the tonic, regardless of its length, and cadences before the vocal entry in order to give prominence to the soloist's opening phrase.

The entire first section of the da capo aria is set to the first strophe of the aria text. Between 1705 and 1715, the A section was organized into binary form, the two halves or vocal paragraphs each consisting of a complete setting of the aria's first strophe, separated by an intermediate ritornello. Perhaps the reason for this arrangement "was so that the music could expand without unorganized proliferation of word repeats."<sup>64</sup> However, there can be internal phrase and word repetitions within the text-setting; these repetitions are particularly prominent in the second text-setting which is usually longer than the first. Scarlatti adopted this binary structure in most of the arias in his late operas. For example, thirty-three of the forty-one arias in *Griselda* contain two settings of the first strophe separated by an intermediate orchestral ritornello. The systematic use of orchestral ritornellos and text-settings greatly contributed to the expansion of the da capo form and could be considered as the main characteristic which distinguishes the three-part aria of late seventeenth-century opera from the da capo aria of *opera seria*:

Earlier methods of expanding the music of the vocal line, especially the trick of inserting a ritornello after the initial vocal phrase and then making the voice go back to the start (the so-called *Devise*), were now not so necessary and tended to fall into abeyance.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 103.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.





While the *Devise* is common in Scarlatti's early operas, in *Griselda*, it is used in only three arias.<sup>66</sup> The binary form, which is apparent in the majority of Scarlatti's arias, became standard for later da capo arias. As the century progressed, the division of the A section into binary form became so pronounced that the da capo aria became a five-part form. For example, all of the da capo arias in *Arminio* are in this five-part form. Because of the expanded form, there is a decrease in the number of arias in most operas from the second quarter of the eighteenth century. This decrease in the number of arias is demonstrated by comparing the forty-one arias and ensembles in Scarlatti's *Griselda* to the twenty-three arias and ensembles in Hasse's *Arminio*. Although these ordered text-settings greatly contributed to the expansion of the da capo aria as a musical form, the four settings of the first strophe tend to distort the da capo aria as a literary form. King Frederick II of Prussia complained about this situation in a letter to his sister: "il me semble que, d'ailleurs, il y a de l'abus à répéter quatre fois la même chose. Vos comédiens, ma chère soeur, n'ont jamais été mis à si mauvais sauce."<sup>67</sup>

The first complete text-setting usually concludes with a cadence in the dominant for arias in the major mode, or in the relative major (or occasionally the dominant minor) for arias in the minor mode. For example, of the twenty-five arias in the major mode from *Griselda*,

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<sup>66</sup>In contrast, J.S. Bach continued to use the *Devise* in the da capo arias of his cantatas long after it had disappeared from opera.

<sup>67</sup>Quoted in Carl Heinrich Graun, *Montezuma*, ed. Albert Mayer-Reinach, revised by Hans Joachim Moser, vol. 15 of *Denkmäler Deutscher Tonkunst* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1958) introduction p. ix.



sixteen modulate to the dominant at the end of the first vocal paragraph; of the sixteen arias in the minor mode, ten modulate to the relative major, and four modulate to the dominant minor at the end of the first vocal paragraph. These figures indicate that there is definitely a regular key scheme, but it is not always followed. In some of Scarlatti's shorter arias, the A section often remains in the tonic (as in four arias in *Griselda*), or on occasion, the first vocal paragraph may cadence in an unexpected key (two arias in *Griselda* cadence in the supertonic minor). During the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the key scheme of the da capo aria became even more predictable. For example, all twenty-two da capo arias in the major mode in *Arminio* cadence in the dominant at the end of the first vocal paragraph, while the single da capo aria in the minor mode cadences in the relative major at the end of the first vocal paragraph.

The first text-setting is usually followed by an intermediate ritornello, which often remains in the same key as the previous cadence (this is the case in all but two of the arias in *Griselda* with regular dominant or relative major modulations and all of the da capo arias in *Arminio*). In contrast to the opening ritornello, the intermediate ritornello remains rather short, usually between one to six measures in length. The intermediate ritornello is usually based on material from the opening.

Coloratura is an important element in the da capo aria of *opera seria*. Not only is it a virtuoso device to display the talents of the great singers, but it is also a structural one which contributes to the expansion of the da capo form. The composers of Scarlatti's generation



used coloratura with more restraint than was exercised by most later composers. In the arias of Scarlatti, the use of coloratura can vary greatly from long passages of more than ten measures, as in the aria "Come presto nel porto," to short melismas of one or two measures, as in the aria "Nell'aspro mio dolor" from *Griselda*. Some arias in the operas of Scarlatti contain no coloratura passages (as is the case in nineteen arias from *Griselda*). However, most of these arias are rather short, and seem to have more kinship with the tripartite aria of seventeenth-century opera than with the da capo aria of *opera seria*. When coloratura is used, there are either two passages distributed between the two vocal paragraphs (twelve arias in *Griselda*), or a single passage in the second vocal paragraph (eight arias in *Griselda*). In the arias of most later composers, it became standard for each vocal paragraph to contain a coloratura passage (as is the case in eighteen arias from *Arminio*). Coloratura passages usually occur on an important, descriptive, or sonorous word, and usually on the same word in both vocal paragraphs. As the century progressed, the coloratura passages continually increased in size, subsequently increasing the length of the aria. While coloratura passages in Scarlatti's arias are usually only two to four measures in length, in the arias of Hasse, they usually average between eight to sixteen measures in length. In addition, the coloratura became extremely ornate and virtuoso; a typical passage would consist of a syncopated sequential melody of a wide range and numerous large leaps, above a static pedal bass.

The second text-setting of the first section modulates back to the tonic, usually through sequences; rarely is a new key established before



the return of the tonic. The second vocal paragraph can be considered as an expansion of the first, or as a developmental section. Usually melodic and rhythmic fragments are expanded by sequential treatment, and are varied by rearrangement and combination in the same manner that the second setting of the first strophe is varied and expanded by repetitions and combinations of various words and phrases. In addition, the second coloratura passage often can be regarded as a varied expansion of the first. Composers such as Giovanni and Marc Antonio Bononcini were famous for the concise development of material in their arias.<sup>68</sup> However, this development is rarely contrapuntal, especially in the arias of later composers. Usually the development is restricted to the upper melody, while the bass remains a non-thematic accompaniment. During the 1720's and 1730's, it was common to begin the second text-setting with a shortened statement of the main theme or motive in the dominant or relative major. By the time of Hasse, this restatement had become a standardized formula. For example, twenty-one arias in *Arminio* contain a shortened statement of the main theme at the beginning of the second vocal paragraph, eighteen of which are in the dominant. Although it became standard to begin the second vocal paragraph with a shortened statement of the main theme, a final restatement of the theme in the tonic never became a common feature of the da capo aria. The reason for this is that the A section concludes with a return of the opening ritornello in the tonic, which can be regarded as the restatement. Rarely was this ritornello an exact repeat of the opening one, but rather a

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<sup>68</sup> Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," pp. 76, 78 & 82.





shortened version, usually about half the length of the opening ritornello. This ritornello was shortened by the omission and rearrangement of the various motives and sequential passages.<sup>69</sup>

The first of three improvised cadenzas occurs on the final cadential phrase of the second vocal paragraph. These cadenzas could be long and of extreme virtuosity, such as those of Farinelli which were written down for Empress Maria Theresa. However, these cadenzas were restricted in their length by being sung in a single breath. Tosi describes in critical terms the use of cadenzas in the da capo aria:

Every *Air* has (at least) three *Cadences*, that are all three final. Generally speaking, the Study of the Singers of the present Times consists in terminating the *Cadence* of the first Part with an overflowing of *Passages* and *Divisions* at Pleasure, and the *Orchestre* waits; in that of the second the Dose is encreased, and the *Orchestre* grows tired; but on the last *Cadence*, the Throat is set a going, like a Weather-cock in a Whirlwind, and the *Orchestre* yawns.<sup>70</sup>

In the arias of Scarlatti and his contemporaries, the positioning of the cadenza in the score is not always clear. Usually it occurs prior to the cadential phrase and is sometimes indicated by a fermata over a full-bar's rest (nine arias in *Griselda*), or is suggested by setting off the cadential phrase from the main melody by rests in all parts (eleven arias in *Griselda*). These two types of cadenza indications are described by Quantz in his *Versuch*:

. . . between 1710 and 1716, or thereabouts, the cadenzas customary at present, in which the bass must pause, became the mode. Fermatas, in which one pauses *ad libitum* in the middle of a piece, may well have a somewhat earlier origin.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>In contrast, the da capo arias of Bach usually conclude with an exact repetition of the opening ritornello.

<sup>70</sup>Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, pp. 128-29.

<sup>71</sup>Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), pp. 179-80.



By the time of Hasse, the cadenza had shifted its position to the dominant six-four chord of the cadential phrase, and was usually indicated by a fermata. For example, in twenty of the arias from *Arminio* the cadenzas in either one or both sections are indicated by fermatas over the six-four chord of the cadential phrase.

The B section consists of one or two settings of the aria's second strophe. The number of text-settings does not greatly affect the form of this section. Even with two complete text-settings, the second section is usually quite short, often to the point of being perfunctory. The reason for this is that the B section never developed an independent formal structure as did the binary A section. As the century progressed, and the A section increased in size, the B section remained the same, creating a very unbalanced effect. While in the arias of Scarlatti the B section can be relatively large, especially in the shorter arias where it often balances the A section, in the arias of Hasse, the B section is sometimes no longer than one of the coloratura passages from the A section; for example in the arias "Del vento, che desta nel mar" and "Corre al cemento ardita" from *Arminio*, the second coloratura passages are twenty measures long, while the B sections are seventeen and eighteen measures long.<sup>72</sup>

However, the B section has the important function of creating contrast between the expansive first section and its da capo repeat. Instead of clear key areas set off by text-settings and ritornellos, the

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<sup>72</sup>In contrast, the binary structure is evident in the B sections in the arias of Bach; the two text-settings are separated by an intermediate ritornello which give the middle section greater length and importance in his arias; often the middle section is not modulatory but remains in the submediant key.



second section is modulatory in character, although not radically so. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the B section developed a modulatory scheme. The B section of arias in the major mode usually begins on the submediant and modulates to the mediant (as in nineteen of the twenty-five arias in the major mode from *Griselda*). In arias in the minor mode, there is a tendency to modulate to the dominant at the end of the B section (as in twelve of the sixteen arias in the minor mode from *Griselda*). Seldom was any attempt made to create a transition between the contrasting tonal areas of the A and B sections. Perhaps composers felt that a transition would lessen the effect of contrast. During the middle of the eighteenth century, this modulatory scheme, rather than becoming more standardized as is usually the case, became more flexible. For example, the B sections in the major-mode arias of *Arminio* begin on either the tonic minor or major or the submediant, and modulate to either the mediant, the submediant, the subdominant, or the dominant.

The two sections of the da capo aria also differ in their treatment of the orchestra and coloratura. Coloratura tends to be avoided in the B section of most arias (only ten arias in *Griselda* and eight arias in *Arminio* contain coloratura passages in the B section). When coloratura passages are employed, they are usually shorter than those of the A section. Rarely does the B section contain an intermediate ritornello, even when there are two settings of the aria's second strophe (of the fifteen arias from *Griselda* in which the B section contains two text settings, only in five are brief intermediate ritornellos employed).



Although the B section provides an important element of contrast, it is also a continuation of the A section. Too much contrast is usually avoided, because this would lead to the establishment of a second affection, which would not be in keeping with the Baroque Doctrine of the Affections. To ensure emotional continuity, both sections characteristically share common musical material. Usually motivic fragments or rhythmic figures from the A section are developed at greater length in the B section, but in a more casual manner. The B section concludes with the second improvised vocal cadenza. This is followed by either a full da capo repeat of the A section, or by a shortened version of the opening ritornello with a *dal segno* indication leading to the first vocal entry of the A section (nine of the twenty-seven arias in *Griselda* with opening ritornellos are shortened in the da capo with *dal segno* cuts in the opening ritornellos). With the increased size of the da capo aria during the second half of the eighteenth century, it became more common to shorten the opening ritornello on the da capo (only in two arias from *Arminto* is the opening ritornello left intact on the da capo repeat).<sup>73</sup>

In spite of certain modifications, the form of the da capo aria remained basically the same. During the first half of the eighteenth century, it was used by all composers of Italian opera, oratorio, and cantata. The da capo form also found its way into French opera, English oratorio, and the German church cantata. However, the great imbalance

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<sup>73</sup> See Freeman, "Opera without Drama," pp. 229-43. The author presents a plan of the da capo aria as used by Antonio Caldara which is very similar to the one described above. Because Caldara's operas span the era between Scarlatti and Hasse, the author traces the development of Caldara's arias from a three-part to a five-part form.





between the expansive A section and the perfunctory B section began to draw much criticism during the middle eighteenth century. Composers partially responded to these criticisms by gradually omitting the redundant B section and the da capo repeat, and by setting both aria strophes to the two parts of the binary A section. This new aria form was called the *cavatina*, perhaps because it was "carved" (from the Italian verb *cavare*) out of the da capo aria. Frederick II of Prussia, who disliked the numerous text repetitions of the da capo aria, championed the *cavatina*, and encouraged his court composer, Carl Graun, to cultivate it in his operas. In the opera *Montezuma* (1754), for which Frederick provided the prose scenario, the *cavatina* is established by royal decree as the predominant aria form:

La plupart des airs sont faits pour ne point être répétés; Il n'y a que deux airs de l'Empereur et deux d'Eupaforice qui sont destinés pour l'être . . . Graun a fait un chef-d'oeuvre, il est tout en cavatines.<sup>74</sup>

By the 1760's, most Italian composers were experimenting with new forms and the tyranny of the da capo aria came to an end.

#### Orchestration in the Da Capo Aria

The purpose of the orchestra in the da capo aria is to play the ritornellos and to provide the all-important vocal melody with an unobtrusive accompaniment. Scarlatti is usually given credit for expanding the role of the orchestra, both in its interaction with the voice and in its greater use of woodwind and brass instruments. However, the orchestra in Scarlatti's arias never interferes with the voice, as Francesco

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<sup>74</sup>Quoted in Graun, *Montezuma*, introduction p. ix.



Algarotti was careful to mention in his *Saggio Sopra L'Opera in Musica* (1755):

Old Scarlatti was the first who infused life, movement, and spirit in them [the accompaniments]. It was he who clothed their nakedness with the splendid attire of noble accompaniments, but they were dealt out by him in a sober and judicious manner. They were by no means intricate or obscure, but open and obvious; highly finished, yet free from all minuteness of affectation; and that not so much on account of the vastness of the theatres, by means of which many of the minor excellencies in musical performances may be lost, as in regard to the voices, to which alone they should be made subservient.<sup>75</sup>

The basis of the Baroque opera orchestra is the *basso continuo* and the string ensemble. The *basso continuo* consists of cellos and basses doubled in octaves accompanied by the harpsichord. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, older fundamental instruments such as the lute, theorbo, and harp were used occasionally. Arias accompanied only by continuo are frequently found in the opera scores of the early eighteenth century, but by the 1720's, this type of accompaniment is very rare, as Marcello complains in his *Il teatro alla moda*:

He [the composer] should never write an aria with a bass accompaniment only, for he should realize that they are no longer in vogue and that the time spent on one of them he might write a dozen arias with an orchestral accompaniment.<sup>76</sup>

For example, in the early operas of Caldara, almost half of the arias are accompanied by the *basso continuo* (eighteen of the forty-four arias from *L'inimico generoso* (1709) while in later operas, such as *La*

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<sup>75</sup>Oliver W. Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History From Classical Antiquity Through the Romantic Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950), p. 667.

<sup>76</sup>Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*, 34:386.



*clemenza di Tito* (1734) and *Temistocle* (1736), there is not a single continuo aria.<sup>77</sup>

Although the string orchestra was usually divided into four parts (first and second violins, violas, and basses), during the early eighteenth century, other arrangements were possible. The string orchestra could be divided into three parts--violins, violas and basses, (as in six arias in *Griselda*)--or into two parts--violins and basses (as in four arias in *Griselda*). In Scarlatti's earlier operas, two- and three-part accompaniments are the norm rather than the usual four; of the thirty-nine arias in *Odoardo* (1700), there are fifteen continuo arias, seventeen arias with two-part accompaniment, eleven with three-part accompaniment, and only six with four-part accompaniment.<sup>78</sup> But by the 1720's, it was standard to divide the orchestra into four parts (as in twenty-one arias in *Griselda*). Very rarely are there four real parts, because of the great amount of doubling. At this time, it became common practice for the first violins to double the voice, the second violins to play the inner harmonies and the violas to double the basses at an octave above.<sup>79</sup> If the violas were given an independent part, then both first and second violins double the voice. Thus a three-part texture of melody, and two-part accompaniment is normally maintained. Marcello criticizes this practice: "In any four-part compositions the modern

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<sup>77</sup>Freeman, "Opera without Drama," pp. 246-47.

<sup>78</sup>Morey, "Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti," p. 341.

<sup>79</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 109.



composer absolutely must have two parts play in unison or octaves."<sup>80</sup> This systematic doubling reached an extreme in the aria *All' unisono* in which the entire orchestra doubled the voice. While this type of aria was used effectively by certain composers, it was often misused by less talented ones. Marcello refers to this abuse in his *Il teatro alla moda* :

The modern composer must also write canzonettas for alto or mezzo soprano in which the bass instruments play the melody exactly as rendered by the singer, only that they transpose it down several octaves. The violins, on the other hand, will double it in the higher octave. In the score the composer will write out all of these voices and he will call his aria a three-part composition.  
 . . .<sup>81</sup>

To this basic orchestra of strings and continuo, oboes, bassoons, and flutes are sometimes added. Oboes and flutes are often employed separately because in many opera orchestras they were played by the same persons. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, both recorders and transverse flutes were used, but by the 1720's, recorders had been replaced by their more modern counterpart. Although it is seldom indicated in the scores, bassoons usually doubled the bass line when flutes or oboes are employed. Flutes and oboes can be treated basically in two ways; either they are given their own separate parts, though this often entails some duplication of the violins, or they simply double the violins. The oboes were often treated in the latter manner in order to strengthen the violins. In general, the oboes are employed with greater frequency than are the flutes. Steffani was especially fond of the

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<sup>80</sup> Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*, 34:385.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 34:385.





oboes and bassoons, perhaps because of the influence of French and German music with its preference for woodwind coloring. In his opera *Tas-silone* (1709), oboes and bassoons are employed in twenty-three of the twenty-five arias with instrumental accompaniments; in another eight continuo arias, oboes and bassoons are introduced in the final ritornello for *tutti* orchestra. While the oboes and bassoons merely double the strings in eight of these arias, the oboes are given independent parts in thirteen arias and the bassoons in three.

Trumpets and horns are occasionally added to this enlarged orchestra of strings, woodwinds, and continuo, often for special effects. The trumpets are reserved for martial or ceremonial scenes, where they are sometimes doubled by the horns. For example, Porpora's London operas begin and end with ceremonial scenes that employ the full orchestra with trumpets and horns.<sup>82</sup> The *corni da caccia* were first introduced into the opera orchestra by Scarlatti in *Tigrane* (1715), and they appear in most of his subsequent operas.<sup>83</sup> *Griselda*, for example, employs the horns in three arias and two sinfonias. Although horns had certain programmatic connotations with ceremonial and hunting scenes, they could be used in non-programmatic contexts as coloristic instruments. Thus as the century progressed, composers, following the example of Scarlatti, made greater use of the horns in their arias (for example, nine of the twenty-five arias and ensembles in *Arminio* are scored for horns).

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<sup>82</sup>Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," p. 82.

<sup>83</sup>Morey, "Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti," p. 181.



However, at this time the horn parts, like those for the trumpet, became simpler and more idiomatic in comparison to those in earlier scores.

Besides the addition of woodwind and brass instruments, the basic orchestra could be varied in several other ways. One means of creating variety was to dispense with the continuo, either the harpsichord alone, or else the entire continuo group. When the entire continuo is dispensed with, the bass part is usually played by the viola. This coloristic technique was developed by Carlo Polarolli during the 1690's, and became very popular with later composers, as Marcello described:

There must be no bass in the accompaniment to an aria. To keep the singer from straying he should be accompanied by violins in unison; in such a case a few bass notes might be given to the violas but this is *ad libitum*.<sup>84</sup>

This quote may refer to Vivaldi who frequently wrote arias without continuo (for example, see the arias "Transit aetas, volant anni" and "Vivat in pace" from Vivaldi's oratorio *Juditha Triumphans*). The absence of the continuo created a light airy texture more characteristic of the Pre-Classical than of the Baroque style. Occasionally *pizzicato* or mutes are used for special effects. The aria "Della misera germana" from Act I of *Arminio* employs a muted string orchestra of first and second violins *divisi*, first and second violas, and continuo with doubling flutes; and the aria "Augelletti, zefiretti" from Caldara's *Dafne* employs *pizzicato* strings *senza cembalo*.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*, 34:383.

<sup>85</sup>Antonio Caldara, *Dafne*, ed. Constantin Schneider, vol. 91 of *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1955).



Elements of the Baroque concerto are often evident in the orchestration of the da capo aria. There are two basic ways in which the concerto principle, taken in its broadest sense, could be applied to the aria: the division of the orchestra into *tutti* and *solo*, and the interaction between the voice and a concertizing instrument. The division of the orchestra into *tutti* and *solo*, which is the basis of the Baroque concerto, was probably first developed in the opera aria. The late cantatas and serenatas of Alessandro Stradella contain some of the earliest examples of concerto writing. In Stradella's *Cantata per il Santissimo Natale*, for example, the orchestra is divided into *concertino* and *concerto grosso* throughout; some arias are scored for either *concertino* or *concerto grosso*, while others are scored for both groups set in opposition. Most later operas do not employ the concerto principle with the same consistency and clarity as this early example does. The division of the orchestra into *concerto grosso* (*tutti*) and *concertino* (*solo*) is only hinted at in the scores. The most basic application of the concerto principle is the use of a larger orchestra (*concerto grosso*) in the ritornellos and a smaller one (*concertino*) during the vocal sections. For example, the string orchestra is often reduced to a quartet or trio during the vocal sections, and when oboes (or flutes) and bassoons are added to the orchestra, they are often omitted during the vocal sections. This not only introduced more variety in the scoring and dynamics, but had the practical advantage of avoiding conflict with the voice. The *concertino/concerto grosso* division was also emphasized by giving each group its own harpsichord continuo. The payroll sheets of many opera houses, such as San Carlo in Naples, prove that most opera orchestras employed two harpsichords, one for the *concertino* and one



for the *concerto grosso*.<sup>86</sup> Composers were not precise in their indications, and many arias that are scored for strings may have employed oboes and bassoons in actual performance to strengthen the ritornellos. Donald J. Grout in his edition of *Griselda* suggests this may be the correct way of interpreting those sections marked *forte* (the ritornellos).

The concerto principle could be expanded by employing solo instruments to concertize with the orchestra and/or the voice. In these concerto-like arias, one or sometimes two or three instruments from the orchestra could be singled out as soloists. The most common solo instruments were the violin, oboe, flute, cello, and trumpet, although other instruments and instrumental combinations are possible. Arias with obbligato solos were very popular at the beginning of the eighteenth century, before the orchestra had been fully developed. Stefani's *Tassilone* contains many interesting examples of arias with obbligato solos. Some of the arias are scored for only obbligato instruments and continuo without any orchestral accompaniment. In these arias, the solo instruments both play the ritornellos and concertize with the voice, creating the texture of a trio sonata or of a quartet; for example, the solo violin and oboe in "Di ritrovar ristoro" and "In faccia a queste," solo oboe and bassoon in "Dal tuo labbro amor m'invita," two solo oboes in "Già mi pento," and solo bassoon in "Sinor foste il mio tormento." In other arias, the string orchestra is added as accompaniment to the obbligato instruments, making the aria, in effect, a concerto movement. For example, *Tassilone* contains five concerted arias scored

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<sup>86</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 97.





for solo oboe and orchestra, and one aria for solo trumpet and orchestra; the latter is an excellent example of the aria *di battaglia*--a martial coloratura aria scored for castrato voice and obbligato trumpet. During the second quarter of the eighteenth century, arias with obbligato instruments became less common. When they were employed, they were usually relegated to the ritornellos, so as not to detract any attention from the vocal melody.<sup>87</sup>

### Other Musical Forms

The dominance of the singer and the da capo aria did not encourage composers and librettists to make much use of orchestral, ballet, choral, and ensemble music. This emphasis on the solo voice coincided with the beginnings of public opera and the star system in Venice, and is evident in the late operas of Monteverdi. This practice was continued into the late Baroque *opera seria*. Orchestral music was usually restricted to the overture, which was used to quiet the audience before the opera, and to one or two brief sinfonias, which were used to introduce an act or a scene or to accompany some type of action on stage. The most common type of overture was the three-movement sinfonia which was established by Alessandro Scarlatti at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>88</sup> This type of overture was characterized by its movement sequence of fast-slow-fast, its light homophonic textures, and its concise triadic themes; in form, texture, and thematic structure, the sinfonia was the

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>88</sup>Edward J. Dent, *Alessandro Scarlatti: His Life and Works*, New Impression with preface and additional notes by Frank Walker (St. Claire Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1976), pp. 59-63.



obvious predecessor of the Classical symphony. The other type of overture was the French *ouverture*, which had been established by Lully during the middle seventeenth century, consisting of a slow homophonic movement with prominent dotted rhythms, followed by a fast fugal movement. The French *ouverture* was often employed by certain Italian or Italianate composers working in northern Europe. For example, while the operas Porpora wrote for Naples begin with sinfonias, those written for London begin with French *ouvertures*.<sup>89</sup> Ballet music in *opera seria* was very uncommon until mid-century, when it was sometimes placed at the end of an act to serve as an intermezzo; usually another composer provided the music for these ballets.

Because of the high salaries of the singers and the public's love for solo singing, many theatres did not employ a chorus. Even when a chorus was employed, choral music was relegated to the occasional choral interjection during crowd scenes and the traditional *coro* finale. The *coro* is usually a short homophonic piece, with prominent dance rhythms, in either binary or ternary form. When there was no chorus, the *coro* was sung by the combined members of the cast. The perfunctory treatment of orchestral and choral music in *opera seria* contrasts with the lavish use of ballet, descriptive *symphonies*, and choral music in the French operas of Lully, Campra, and Rameau. An exception to this is the *festa teatrale*, a type of *opera seria* which was written for certain princely courts on festive occasions. These festive operas incorporated the

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<sup>89</sup>Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," p. 80.



ballet, orchestral, and choral music of French opera in order to achieve a ceremonial atmosphere appropriate to the occasion. One of the most famous examples of the *fiesta teatrale* is Johann Joseph Fux's *Costanza e Fortezza*, which was lavishly produced at Prague in 1723 for the coronation of Emperor Charles VI.<sup>90</sup>

Ensembles in *opera seria* were restricted to one or two duets, usually between the *prima donna* and the *primo uomo* or the *seconda donna* and the *secondo uomo*. These duets were not true ensembles, but were actually *da capo* arias for two soloists. Unlike the choral and instrumental music, the duet was not treated perfunctorily but was given a great amount of attention by both the composer and the audience.<sup>91</sup> Certain composers, such as Scarlatti and Vivaldi, following the innovations of *opera buffa*, made greater use of ensembles. For example, all of Scarlatti's last nine operas contain at least one quartet; Scarlatti even experimented with larger ensembles such as the quintet in *Il Pastor di Corinto*, the sextet in *Turno Aricino* and the septet in *Eraclaea*.<sup>92</sup> Like the duets, most of these ensembles are lyrical arias in which the main melodic line is shared among the soloists. For example, the septet in *Eraclaea* was written on one stave, and some of the quartets are designated as *Aria a Quattro*. When the characters are given different texts, a true ensemble was sometimes created by giving each character or group

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<sup>90</sup> Johann Joseph Fux, *Costanza e Fortezza*, ed. Egon Wellesz, vol. 17 of *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1910).

<sup>91</sup> Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 64.

<sup>92</sup> Morey, "Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti," p. 162.



of characters their own melodic lines in the *parlando* style of *opera buffa*; the trio and quartet in *Griselda* can be considered as dramatic ensembles.

### Irregularities in the Structure of Opera Seria

The rigid formality of *opera seria* is occasionally broken in order to enhance the drama and/or to create musical variety. Most operas contain one or two arias that are not in da capo form. The most common non-da capo aria is the arietta; the arietta is usually a short through-composed or binary air that lies stylistically between the aria and the accompanied recitative, partaking of the lyricism of the former and the flexibility of the latter. In contrast to the da capo aria, the arietta is usually found at the beginning of a scene and is not followed by an exit (the *escite* of Zeno). For example, Act I, scene 5 and Act IV, scene 5 of Steffani's *Tassilone* begin with ariettas for Theodata and Geroldo respectively, who remain on stage until their subsequent exit da capo arias.<sup>93</sup> Porpora frequently employed the arietta in his London operas; *Arianna* and *Polifemo* contain eight and nine ariettas respectively.<sup>94</sup>

On rare occasions, other aria forms are used to replace the da capo aria. For example, Attilio's aria "Nella procella, che agitata l'alma" from Act III of Scarlatti's *Marco Attilio Regolo* is a full-scale exit aria in binary form, and Marzia's aria "No del tuo figlia sangue"

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<sup>93</sup>Agostino Steffani, *Tassilone*, ed. Gerhard Croll, vol. 8 of *Denkmäler Rheinischer Musik* (Düsseldorf: Musikverlag Schwann, 1958).

<sup>94</sup>Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," p. 75.





from Act III of Hasse's *Arminio* is a large rondo structure in which two contrasting sections *Presto* 4/4 and *Lento* 3/4 are set in alternation. This structure was probably suggested by the irregular aria text that is addressed to two characters, both together and separately, rather than to the audience, and is based on two contrasting affections. Many of these irregularities in form are conditioned by the libretto. An excellent example is the aria "Se cerca, se dice" from Metastasio's *L'Olimpiade*. Because the aria text is twelve rather than the usual eight lines in length, it is set by most composers as a non-da capo aria usually in some type of two-part form.<sup>95</sup> It is rather peculiar that these few non-da capo arias, which are considered by the twentieth century as "more dramatic" than the da capo form (dramatic in the sense that the shorter more varied forms are better able to follow the pace of the drama), were used regularly by these same operatic composers in their church music where the da capo aria would have been considered too theatrical; for example, the arias in the *Stabat Mater* settings of Scarlatti, Pergolesi, and Vivaldi are short through-composed airs which would be admirably suited to an operatic context. Thus composers seemed to associate the da capo aria form with the theatre and dramatic music.

Most operas contain one or two arias in which the B section is set in complete contrast to the A section. Contrast is created by introducing new musical material and by changing the tempo and the metre and occasionally the key signature and orchestration. This type of contrasting B section often occurs in arias in which the second aria strophe

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<sup>95</sup>Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, pp. 129-32.



seems to establish a different and often contrasting affection. For example, the aria text to "Scelga il dardo" from Act II of Steffani's *Tassilone* expresses revenge and violence in the first strophe and death and despair in the second strophe. The A section is set as a coloratura aria in *Allegro* 4/4 and is scored for oboes, bassoons, and four-part strings; while the B section is a lament in *Lento* 3/2, and is scored for strings. Additional contrast is created by the contrapuntal texture of the B section, which is rather uncommon in *opera seria*. By the middle of the eighteenth century, this type of aria was used with greater frequency, becoming more of a musical than a dramatic technique. For example, ten of the twenty-three da capo arias in Hasse's *Arminio* have contrasting B sections.

Occasionally, contrasting sections are introduced in either the A or B sections. For example, the B section of the trio in Act I of Hasse's *Arminio* is divided into two contrasting parts; the first, *Un poco lento* 3/4, for Arminio and Tusedda, and the second, *Andante* 4/4, for Segeste. Another slightly different treatment of this technique occurs in the aria "Dentro al seno" from *Tassilone*. This aria is a double affection aria with the A section in *Presto* 4/4, and the B section in *Lento* 3/2. During the B section, Steffani inserts nine bars of *Presto* 4/4 taken from the coda of the A section, creating the effect of a da capo repeat. However, after the cadence, there is a varied repeat of the entire B section (*Lento* 3/2), which is then followed by the long-delayed da capo repeat. This type of alteration creates a surprising effect similar to a false recapitulation in a Haydn symphony.



On rare occasions, the da capo aria is interrupted by the dramatic action. Set amidst the formal regularity of *opera seria*, this type of verisimilitude could be very unexpected, and sometimes shocking. Scarlatti experimented with these dramatic interruptions in ten arias in *Marco Attilio Regolo* of 1719.<sup>96</sup> Four of the ten interruptions occur in the comic intermezzos at the end of Acts I and II and in the middle of Act III where they are less conspicuous because of the realistic nature of *opera buffa*. The other six interrupted arias, with one exception, are found in the serious scenes of Act II. Four of these interruptions occur in arias that are clearly in da capo form, although there is no da capo. In these examples, Scarlatti exploits the formal regularity of the da capo aria by writing a very regular A section which creates the expectation of the B section and the da capo. When the interruption does occur--at the end of the final ritornello of the A section (as in "Tutta sdegna ho l'alma" and "Ombre chieche orror di morte"), or at the beginning of the B section (as in "Va il mio cor"), or even at the beginning of the second vocal paragraph (as in "Vieni in sogno amato bene")--it is all the more surprising. All of these arias are interrupted on a chord other than the tonic, by simple recitative, as another character makes an untimely entrance. There seems to be no way to determine whether the librettist or the composer was responsible for these irregularities. All of the arias consist of a single strophe. This may have been the intention of the librettist, or perhaps there was originally a second strophe to these arias which Scarlatti chose not to

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<sup>96</sup> Alessandro Scarlatti, *Marco Attilio Regolo*, ed. Joscelyn Goodwin, vol. 2 of *The Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).



set, in order to employ this unusual technique. Similar dramatic interruptions also occur in the arietta "Di sdnegno d'amore" and the duet "Prendi, O cara."

Another alteration in the da capo form which can be used to enhance the drama is the suppression of the opening ritornello in order to allow the voice to utter an emphatic phrase or word before the orchestra is heard, creating the effect of elision between the aria and the preceding recitative. This type of formal irregularity often occurs when the opening phrase of the aria is a continuation of the preceding recitative dialogue. For example, there are four arias in Scarlatti's *Marco Attilio Regolo* in which the voice enters before the orchestra. In all four arias, the soloist's opening phrase is a continuation of the preceding recitative, being either the conclusion of a speech (as in "Spera un dì per tuo riposa" and "Vanne infida") or a question (as in "Non la vuoi?") or an answer to a question (as in "Si, superbo, tu cadrà"). The aria text to "Non la vuoi?" has no rhyme scheme and seems to have been carved out of the recitative in order to be set as an aria (this is what contemporaries would have called a *cavata*). It is curious that these four arias occur consecutively at the beginning of Act II and are followed by the interrupted arias mentioned above. Thus in the first twelve of the seventeen serious scenes in Act II, there are only two arias and a trio in regular da capo form. Perhaps Scarlatti (or his librettist) was trying to achieve some type of dramatic continuity and musical flexibility in the second act of this opera. The experimental nature of this Act contrasts sharply with the regular formal structures of Acts I and III.





Musical quotation or recapitulation is not a characteristic of *opera seria*. In the operas in which it does occur, it is usually conditioned by the libretto. When the same or a similar text occurs at another point in the opera, it was usually accompanied by the same or similar music. A celebrated example of quotation occurs in Metastasio's *Alessandro nell 'Indie*. There is a strong similarity in the texts to the arias "Se mai più sarò geloso" (in which Poro assures Cleofide that he will never be a jealous lover) and "Se mai turbo il tuo riposo" (in which Cleofide assures Poro of her fidelity). Later in the opera, Cleofide causes Poro to be jealous and they quarrel. In a duet, they each sarcastically quote the other's previous vows:

The text invited some musical connection between one or both solos and the duet, and composers for fifty years or more commonly related them regardless of the fact that once the work had been set two or three times it was no longer original to do so.<sup>97</sup>

Vinci, who in 1729 was the first to set this libretto, connected all three pieces by the same material and the same key, B-flat major. In Handel's setting of the same libretto under the title of *Poro* (1731), these repetitions are given the same treatment except that Poro's music is in E-flat and Cleofide's music is in B-flat major. Porpora's *Arianna* contains several striking examples of musical quotation. The words of the message carved by Antiope upon a tree to cause dissension between Arianna and Teseo are given the same arioso setting each time they recur: first sung by Antiope in F, then twice by Arianna in G and F, and finally by Teseo in C. Another example occurs at the end of the opera when Arianna quotes two variants of a phrase from a love aria by Teseo

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<sup>97</sup> Robinson, *Neapolitan Opera*, p. 133.



in her sleep. This creates dramatic irony because as she sleeps, assured of Teseo's love, Teseo abandons her on the island of Naxos.<sup>98</sup>

Certain operas will contain a grand *scena* in which the various forms of *opera seria*--the aria, arietta, sinfonia, and simple and accompanied recitative--are combined to achieve a musical/dramatic climax. The grand *scena* often occurs in operas with a lengthy monologue in which violent emotions are expressed, such as a mad scene. The grand *scena* is employed in this manner in Scarlatti's *Marco Attilio Regolo* Act III to depict Fausta's madness. As Fausta visits the tomb of her husband, Attilio, who supposedly has been murdered by her captor and suitor Amilicare, her grief and desire for revenge cause her to see visions of Amilicare being punished by the furies. The *scena* is actually an elaboration of an accompanied recitative and da capo aria. The accompanied recitative is an extended piece, fifty-six measures in length, but is occasionally interrupted by passages of simple recitative in which Attilio, who is actually alive and hiding in his crypt, makes several asides. The sections of the monologue are set apart by the changing treatment of the orchestral accompaniment and the tempo: Fausta's lament is accompanied by the sustained chords of the orchestra without harpsichord; then as she reads the inscription on the tomb, there is a change of tempo and pulsating chords in the orchestra; her madness begins with a vision of the opening of the gates of hell, depicted by a *lento* passage for orchestra in dotted rhythms; in her vision of the furies, the orchestra plays *Presto conitato*-like passages of repeated notes and scales between the vocal phrases; in the final section in

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<sup>98</sup>Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," p. 81.



which she envisions the dead Amilcare, the orchestra accompanies the voice in continuous arpeggios in the violins and violas. In the following aria, Fausta, believing she is still in the underworld, searches for her husband. After a very regular A section, the accompanied recitative returns as Fausta, seeing a vision of Cupid, tries to avoid his arrows. The orchestra plays brief descriptive figures and then a ritornello which leads back to the da capo repeat of the A section. Thus the accompanied recitative serves as the B section of the da capo aria. After the aria and a brief aside by Attilio, Fausta resumes her madness in an accompanied recitative of sixteen measures, until Attilio brings her back to her senses and to simple recitative. A short dialogue of simple recitative leads to a duet in which they rejoice in their reunion.

Although these irregular forms are both musically and historically interesting, they are almost always a small minority. Most *opere serie* consist of a series of alternating da capo arias and simple recitatives. The occasional irregular form does stand out amid this formally rigid background, but it does not greatly effect the overall structure of an opera consisting of between twenty and thirty da capo arias. For example, Robert Freeman states that over ninety-five percent of Caldara's total operatic output consists of da capo arias.<sup>99</sup> Very rarely will the irregular forms balance the da capo arias as they do in Porpora's *Arianna* and *Polifemo*. In these two remarkable operas, the da capo arias are actually outnumbered by the ariettas, accompanied recitatives, and

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<sup>99</sup> Freeman, "Opera without Drama," p. 229.



ensembles.<sup>100</sup> Most composers, including the great masters such as Scarlatti, Hasse, and Vivaldi were content to work within this highly stylized convention. Although these *opera seria* conventions have been criticized for the last two centuries as being absurd, the composers saw nothing absurd about writing highly stylized and artificial music for a genre that, by its very nature, is stylized and artificial.

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<sup>100</sup> Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," pp. 71-73.





## CHAPTER 2

### THE OPERAS OF HANDEL

#### Preliminary Considerations

##### Handel's Operatic Career

From the time Handel left Halle in 1703, until the composition of *Messiah* in 1741, his primary musical interest was Italian opera. Although most of Handel's instrumental and sacred music and a significant number of oratorios were written during this period, they were actually secondary activities to his operatic production.

While employed as a violinist at the Hamburg opera house, Handel composed his first operas: *Almira* (1705), *Nero* (1705), and *Florindo und Dafne* (1706). Although only the first opera survives, it shows that Handel modelled his early operas on those of Reinhard Keiser with their polyglot libretti and their eclectic mixture of German, Italian, and French musical styles. In 1706, Handel left Hamburg for Italy in order to study the Italian opera first hand.<sup>1</sup> Because Handel resided in Rome where a Papal ban prohibited opera, he concentrated primarily on the composition of Italian chamber cantatas. The chamber cantata is actually *opera seria* in miniature, and it

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<sup>1</sup>See Ursula Kirkendale, "The Ruspoli Documents on Handel," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 20 (1967):222-53 for recent research on Handel's stay in Italy.



became the training ground where Handel developed as an opera composer. In addition, these cantatas provided him with a storehouse of musical material that he was to re-use continually in his operas and oratorios. It is not known where or when Handel's first Italian opera, *Rodrigo*, was performed, or if it was ever performed, although it is usually thought to have been written for Florence about 1707. *Agrippina*, Handel's second Italian opera, was written specifically for Venice, and was produced with great success at the Teatro San Giovanni Crisostomo in 1709. In this last major work which Handel composed in Italy, he established himself as an extremely talented opera composer of international fame. One of the reasons for the extraordinary success of *Agrippina* was that Handel and his librettist, Cardinal Grimani, conceived the opera within the traditions and conventions of seventeenth-century Venetian opera.<sup>2</sup>

The next opportunity for operatic activity came in London, where Handel produced *Rinaldo* in 1711. In *Rinaldo*, the librettists Aaron Hill and Giacomo Rossi made "a conscious attempt to establish a local variety of *opera seria*," which combined the magical subjects and elaborate scenic display of French opera with *opera seria*.<sup>3</sup> This attempt was repeated in *Teseo* (1713) and *Amadigi* (1715), both of which are based on French libretti, in hopes of repeating the great success of *Rinaldo*. The other two operas of this period, *Il Pastor Fido* (1713) and *Silla* (1714) also can be considered as variants of *opera seria*; the former is a pastoral opera, while the latter is a chamber opera

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<sup>2</sup>Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," p. 149.

<sup>3</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 28.



intended for private performance at Burlington House. Opera fell temporarily into disfavor between 1715 and 1720, and at this time Handel found employment at Canons providing anthems for the Duke of Chandos.

In 1720, the Royal Academy of Music was founded under the patronage of King George I and the nobility, with the express purpose of providing London with regular operatic productions. Although the company had princely patronage, like the operatic establishments on the Continent, it was also a commercial venture with stocks that were bought and sold like those of the contemporary South Sea Company. Handel, Giovanni Bononcini, and later Attilio Ariosti were appointed as the composers for the Academy, and an impressive troupe of singers was employed which eventually included the castrato Senesino, the sopranos Cuzzoni and Faustina, the altos Durastanti and Anastasia Robinson, the tenor Borosini and the bass Boschi. The formation of the Royal Academy marks the beginning of Handel's greatest period of operatic activity. Until its dissolution in 1728, Handel produced one or two operas every season for the Academy: *Radamisto* (1720), *Muzio Scevola* (Act III only) and *Floridante* (1721), *Ottone* (1722), *Flavio* (1723), *Giulio Cesare* and *Tamerlano* (1724), *Rodelinda* (1725), *Scipione* and *Alessandro* (1726), *Admeto* and *Riccardo Primo* (1727), and *Siroe* and *Tolomeo* (1728). In contrast to Handel's early London operas, all of the operas of this period are based on historical subjects and are of the heroic-dynastic type favored by Zeno and Metastasio. During the first five years of the Royal Academy period, Handel created some of his finest operas, in particular *Radamisto*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Rodelinda*, and *Tamerlano*. His later operas, while not musically inferior to these works, are



dramatically flawed because the libretti were adapted in order to appease the jealousy of two rival *prime donne*.<sup>4</sup> The Royal Academy attempted to exploit rivalries in order to arouse public interest. At first the Academy pitted the talents of the two major composers, Handel and Bononcini against each other. This created a controversy that eventually developed political overtones, with the Tories supporting Bononcini and the Whigs supporting Handel.<sup>5</sup> When this controversy was resolved by the ascendancy of Handel, the Academy employed a new soprano, Faustina, to rival Cuzzoni. This rivalry ended in a fight on stage between the two ladies which scandalized and delighted London social circles. However, the public was beginning to lose interest in this alien art form. This lack of interest combined with the high costs of production and the sudden popularity of the English ballad operas caused the Royal Academy to fold in 1728.

After a trip to the Continent to recruit new singers and to familiarize himself with the latest developments in Italian opera, Handel formed a partnership with the impresario Heidegger, and under the partial patronage of King George II, founded a second Royal Academy of Music. During the first period of this second Royal Academy, Handel wrote seven operas: *Lotario* (1729), *Partenope* (1730), *Porro* (1731), *Ezio* and *Sosarme* (1732), *Orlando* (1733), and *Arianna* (1734). In the Metastasian operas *Porro* and *Ezio*, Handel experimented with the new Neapolitan style he had encountered during his recent trip to Italy,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Henry Lang, *George Frideric Handel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966), pp. 177-78.





while in *Orlando* and *Arianna*, he returned to the magical and mythological libretti of his early London operas. Interest in opera partially revived, and the Prince of Wales formed a rival opera company in 1733. There were political motives behind the formation of this company; the Prince of Wales, who was constantly at odds with his father, sought to destroy the opera company to which the King was the principal subscriber.<sup>6</sup> The Opera of the Nobility, as the new company was called, appointed Nicola Porpora as musical director and Farinelli as *primo uomo*, and managed to seduce most of Handel's singers into their employ. At the end of the season, Heidegger broke off the partnership with Handel and allowed the rival company access to the Haymarket Theatre.

Undaunted by these setbacks, Handel moved the remnants of his company to the Theatre Royale at Covent Garden, and continued the competition for several years until both companies went bankrupt in 1738. "When London had failed to support one opera company, it was a curious piece of economics to expect it to patronize two."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps only the political motives caused the two companies to survive as long as they did. While in competition with the Opera of the Nobility, Handel wrote *Ariodante* and *Alcina* (1735), *Atalante* (1736), and *Arminio*, *Giustino* and *Berenice* (1737). Because of the presence of a ballet troupe and a chorus at Covent Garden during the 1735 season, both *Alcina* and *Ariodante* employ ballet and choral *divertissements* similar to French opera. Like *Orlando*, *Ariodante* and *Alcina* are based on chapters from Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso*.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>7</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 33.



The fierce competition caused Handel to have a complete physical and mental breakdown, but after a cure at Aachen, he resumed the composition of operas, first on commission and then independently. While *Faramondo* (1738) is a heroic opera based on Zeno, Handel's last three operas, *Serse* (1738), *Imeneo* (1740), and *Deidamia* (1741) represent a revival of the heroic comedy of seventeenth-century Venetian opera. These operas contain elements of comedy and parody and are freer in their formal structure than *opera seria* is. By 1740, Handel had finally realized that the English oratorio, the form he had developed during the last decade, was financially more profitable than Italian opera. In addition, *Athalia* (1733) and *Saul* (1738) had proved to Handel that the flexible form of the English oratorio was more conducive to creating dramatic music than was the rigid form of *opera seria*. Although Handel abandoned opera after the failure of *Deidamia*, he continued to compose dramatic music in his English oratorios.<sup>8</sup>

#### Handel's Opera Libretti

The libretti of Handel's operas differ in several ways from those set by most contemporary composers on the Continent. Unlike most contemporaries, who favored the famous libretti of Metastasio and Zeno, Handel set only three libretti by Metastasio—*Siroe*, *Porro* and *Ezio*—and one by Zeno—*Faramondo*—and even these were greatly altered.

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<sup>8</sup>For additional information on Handel's operatic career, see the following: Burney, *A General History of Music*, pp. 672-830; Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, chapter 3; Edward J. Dent, "The Operas," *Handel: A Symposium*, ed. Gerald Abraham (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); Lang, *Handel*, chapters 5, 7, 10 & 12; and Richard A. Streatfeild, *Handel*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1910), chapters 4-9.



Most of the libretti set by Handel are by lesser known writers and usually date from the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. These older libretti were revised by the two librettists employed by the Royal Academy, Nicola Haym and Paulo Rolli. There were two types of revisions. The first involved the modification of these old libretti to conform to Metastasian ideals, by clarifying a standard pattern of alternating recitative and da capo exit arias, reducing the number of characters, the number of subplots, and the number of arias, and removing comic scenes, unnecessary intrigue, and immorality. The second revision involved the adaptation of these libretti to suit the particular tastes of the London audiences. Because the London audience did not understand Italian, opera was essentially a musical entertainment. Thus the dramatically important but musically barren recitative was greatly reduced in Handel's libretti, often to the detriment of the drama, in order to allow for less of a time lapse between the all-important arias. Even the celebrated texts of Metastasio underwent this damaging revision because of their long recitative sections.<sup>9</sup>

With a few exceptions, most of Handel's opera libretti came to him second- or third-hand. For example, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* is an arrangement by Haym of a libretto by Giacomo Francesco Bussani, originally set by Antonio Sartorio for Venice in 1677;<sup>10</sup> *Tamerlano* is an arrangement by Haym of a libretto by Count Agostino Piovene,

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<sup>9</sup>See Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, chapter 4; and Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," pp. 141-42.

<sup>10</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 40.



combined with an anonymous revised version of Piovene's libretto entitled *Il Bajazet*, both originally set by Francesco Gasparini for Venice in 1710 and 1719;<sup>11</sup> and *Ariodante* is an arrangement of Antonio Salvi's *Genevra Principessa di Scozia* originally set by Antonio Perti for the Pratolino in 1708.<sup>12</sup> Other libretti have a more complex history; *Serse* is based on a libretto by Nicolo Minato which was originally set by Cavalli in 1654, and was later adapted by Silvio Stampiglia for Giovanni Bononcini in 1695 before being set by Handel in 1738.<sup>13</sup> The operas *Amadigi* and *Teseo* have the unique distinction of being arrangements of French rather than Italian libretti; *Teseo* is based on Philippe Quinault's *Thésée* as set by Jean-Baptiste Lully in 1675, and *Amadigi* is based on Antoine-Houdar de la Motte's *Amadis de Grèce* as set by André Destouches in 1699.<sup>14</sup>

Because of the pastiche nature of many of Handel's libretti, the literary quality is on the whole inferior to the opera libretti of his contemporaries. While literary quality did not matter in London, where few in the audience understood the language, it is nevertheless curious that Handel was so uncritical of the libretti he set. Although Handel was certainly sensitive to good poetry, as is proven by his settings

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<sup>11</sup>J. Merrill Knapp, "Handel's *Tamerlano*: The Creation of an Opera," *Musical Quarterly* 56 (1970):405-430.

<sup>12</sup>Winton Dean, "Ariodante: Unity of Music, Drama, Ballet and Spectacle," article accompanying the recording *Ariodante* (R C A LSC-6200).

<sup>13</sup>Harold S. Powers, "Il Serse Trasformato," *Musical Quarterly* 47 (1961):481-92, and 48 (1962):73-92.

<sup>14</sup>David Kimbell, "The Libretto of Handel's *Teseo*," *Music and Letters* 44 (1963):371-79; and David Kimbell, "The *Amadis* Operas of Destouches and Handel," *Music and Letters* 49 (1968):329-46.





of Milton and Dryden, he seems to have set whatever came his way, regardless of its literary value. (His contemporary Rameau was plagued by the same lack of literary discernment.) In spite of the poor literary quality of Handel's texts, many make good opera libretti. Because the main function of the *opera seria* libretto was to provide the composer with a series of aria situations, the libretti with the strongest, most varied, and most natural situations were best suited for musical setting regardless of their literary merits. Perhaps another reason why Handel set these older libretti is that they contained more variety in form, character, and subject matter than did the highly stylized libretti of Metastasio. In these older libretti, the regular alternation of exit da capo aria and simple recitative is sometimes broken, the characters are less idealized, and the plots sometimes contain mythological and comic elements.

#### Handel and his Singers

During Handel's career as an opera composer in London, he had at his command some of the greatest singers of the eighteenth century: the castratos Nicolini, Senesino, Carestini, Caffarelli, and Conti, the sopranos Cuzzoni, Faustina, and Strada, the altos Durastanti and Anastasia Robinson, the tenors Borosini and Fabri, and the basses Boschi and Montagnana. At a time when the singers ruled supreme in opera, Handel's relationship with his singers seems in many ways exceptional. He was one of the few composers of the eighteenth century to achieve some type of control over his singers and to curb some of their more flagrant abuses. He was able to achieve this control through his advantageous position as composer and manager, coupled with an "extra-



ordinary combination of tact, patience, humor, personal force, and even threats of physical violence."<sup>15</sup>

The colorful accounts and anecdotes on Handel's relationships with his singers seem to indicate that he would not allow himself to be dominated by his singers, and in open confrontations, he usually emerged victorious. For example, Handel's half-humorous warning to the great Cuzzoni when she joined the Royal Academy in 1722:

Oh, Madame, je sais bien que vous êtes une véritable diablesse, mais je vous ferai savoir, moi, que je suis Béeelzebub, le chef des diables.<sup>16</sup>

During a rehearsal for *Ottone* (1723), Cuzzoni refused to sing the aria "Falsa imagine," insisting that he rewrite it for her as was customary on the Continent. But Handel silenced her complaints by threatening to throw her out of an open window. In a similar way, Handel used verbal threats and abuse to coerce Carestini into singing the aria "Verdi prati" from *Alcina*.<sup>17</sup> Many contemporaries who were familiar with the operatic traditions on the Continent, such as the librettist Rolli, were appalled by Handel's despotic treatment of his singers, and continually refer to him as a tyrant.<sup>18</sup>

Another aspect of Handel's relationship with the singers which is perhaps more revolutionary than his threats of defenestration was the influence he exerted upon them. For example, Burney stated that

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<sup>15</sup>Grout, *History of Opera*, p. 192.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Streatfeild, *Handel*, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup>Newman Flower, *Handel: His Personality and his Times*, revised ed. (London: Cassell and Co., 1959), p. 229-30.

<sup>18</sup>See Rolli's letters in Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955).



Senesino gained his reputation as an actor in the "celebrated" accompanied recitatives of Handel, such as "Alma del gran Pompeo" and "Dall'ondoso periglio" from *Giulio Cesare*.<sup>19</sup> Handel had an even greater influence on the soprano Strada del Po who was his *prima donna* throughout the 1730's. Burney states that

Strada was a singer formed by himself, and modelled on his own melodies. She came hither a coarse and aukward [sic] singer with improvable talents, and he at last polished her into reputation and favour.<sup>20</sup>

Although Handel was not a singer, during the 1730's and 1740's he succeeded in developing a new "school" of singers in England who, like Strada, were trained in his music and knew how to render it according to the composer's wishes. Between 1734 and 1737, when the Opera of the Nobility employed most of the Italian singers in London, Handel began to rely on native and non-Italian singers. These included the sopranos Elizabeth Duparc, Cecilia Young, and Miss Edwards, the counter-tenor William Savage, the tenor John Beard, and the Anglo-German basses Gustavus Waltz and Thomas Reinhold.<sup>21</sup> These singers later were to achieve fame in Handel's oratorios.

While Handel was often in conflict with his singers, it would be wrong to assume that he regarded them as a necessary evil. On the contrary, he probably found inspiration in having some of the greatest singers of the period available to interpret his music. The opera scores from the 1720's and the early 1730's would seem to indicate

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<sup>19</sup>Burney, *A General History of Music*, p. 728.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 806.

<sup>21</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 34.



this; the majority of these operas are distinguished by their high musical quality and their "integration of spectacle, vocal brilliance and dramatic expression."<sup>22</sup> Like all eighteenth-century composers, including Mozart, Handel conceived his operas with certain singers in mind in order to exploit their individual talents. Burney considered that "Handel was always remarkably judicious in writing to the tastes and talents of his performers; in displaying excellence, and covering imperfections."<sup>23</sup> A good example of Handel's aptitude for composing music to suit the talents of his singers can be seen in certain arias written for the castrato voice. Most of the *bravura* arias written for the castrati—in particular Senesino—contain a certain type of coloratura, rapid passages in a narrow range and a low register which displayed the castrato vocal quality to its best advantage:

Example 1. Handel, *Giulio Cesare*, "Quel Torrente, che cade dal monte," meas. 27-36.<sup>24</sup>



Bononcini and Ariosti also provided a similar type of coloratura in their castrato arias, which Burney amusingly described as the "furbelows,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, p. 803.

<sup>24</sup> All examples are reproduced from the Deutsche Händelgesellschaft edition of *Georg Friedrich Händels Werke*, ed. Friedrich Chrysander (Reprint, Ridgewood, New Jersey: Gregg Press, Inc., 1965).





flounces and vocal fopperies of the times."<sup>25</sup> Another example of the singers' influence upon the music can be seen in the revisions Handel made when reviving his operas. These revisions were necessitated by the changes in the cast and entailed the transposition—and sometimes the modification—of certain arias to suit the ranges of the new singers. In some cases, old arias were replaced by new ones.<sup>26</sup>

The coloratura passages in some of Handel's arias could be partially regarded as a concession to the singers. Although the coloratura passages in Handel's arias have several different functions, in the *aria di bravura*, the primary function is that of virtuoso display. Each singer usually received at least one *aria di bravura*. Handel usually reserved this type of aria for moments of rejoicing, where the coloratura would be more appropriate, or for simile arias, where it could be exploited for descriptive purposes. The *aria di bravura* is also employed in heroic situations where the virtuoso coloratura, of the type described above, is used to create an impression of strength (as is the case in the title role of *Giulio Cesare*). However, in most dramatic situations, Handel generally avoided virtuoso coloratura. Because the main characters are usually involved in the most dramatic situations, their roles sometimes contain less virtuosity than the roles of the secondary characters. The neutral aria situations and aria texts of the cadet singers sometimes generate music of a more

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<sup>25</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, p. 785.

<sup>26</sup> See J. Merrill Knapp, "Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*," *Studies in Music History: Essays for Oliver Strunk*, ed. Harold S. Powers (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 389-403, for a detailed account of the revisions made for the revivals of *Giulio Cesare* in 1725, 1730, and 1732.



conventional nature which usually includes coloratura. This created the unusual situation wherein the cadet singers were given the majority of the bravura arias. For example, in *Alcina* the role of the secondary character, Oronte, sung by the cadet singer John Beard, was given three coloratura arias, while the main characters, Alcina and Ruggiero, sung by Strada and Carestini, were given only one each. A similar arrangement occurs in *Rodelinda* where the secondary character Unulfo, sung by the cadet singer Pacini, was given three coloratura arias, while the title role, sung by Cuzzoni, was given only two. It is almost certain that this direct reversal of one of the most important operatic conventions would not have been tolerated on the Continent.

Another way in which Handel and his librettists compromised with the singers concerned the division of the arias according to the talents of the singers. Sometimes this had the obvious advantage of giving the characters in the main plot—who were usually portrayed by the best singers—the largest musical roles, and the minor characters of the subplot—who were usually portrayed by the cadet singers—the smaller ones.

In *Giulio Cesare*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, the two main characters—Cesare and Cleopatra, Ariodante and Ginevra, and Ruggiero and Alcina—were sung by the *primo uomo* and *prima donna*; and therefore each character received six or seven arias, while the lesser characters received correspondingly fewer arias. In *Rodelinda*, the triangle relationship is highlighted by giving Rodelinda eight arias, and her husband Bertarido and his rival Grimoaldo six arias each. According to the conventions of *opera seria*, the arias of each character were distributed evenly among the three acts creating a balanced and symmetrical



effect. This logical division of music according to the importance of the characters was an eighteenth-century innovation. During the seventeenth century, the main roles were often performed by actors, who received a minimum of set pieces, while the minor roles were often performed by professional singers, who received a maximum of set pieces.<sup>27</sup> For example, in Bussani's original libretto to *Giulio Cesare*, Cesare's general Curio is given six arias, and Cleopatra's servant Nireno is given five arias, while the hero is given only six arias.<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes this delicate balance was upset when the structure of the libretto and the cast did not complement each other. Between 1725 and 1728, when the Academy employed two *prime donne*, Cuzzoni and Faustina, Handel and his librettists had to create equal roles in an attempt to quell their jealousy, regardless of whether or not the libretto required two leading female roles. Often this arrangement caused the female character involved in the subplot to assume equal importance with the heroine, thus distorting the drama. For example, in the opera *Admeto*, the role of the nymph Antiope (Cuzzoni) in the subplot, is put on a par with Alceste (Faustina) in order to avoid having Cuzzoni be outshone by Faustina. Because of this balancing of roles, the operas of this period are dramatically less successful, although there seems to be no significant decline in the quality of the music.

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<sup>27</sup>Powers, "Il Serse Trasformato," p. 491.

<sup>28</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 40.



### Handel's Musical Style

Handel's musical style differs from that of contemporary Italian composers. When Handel arrived in England in 1710, he composed in the latest Italian style. But rather than keep abreast with the latest styles that issued regularly from Italy during the next fifty years, as his contemporaries had to in order to achieve popular success, Handel adhered to the style he had learned in Italy during his youth. Thus, Handel continued to cultivate and develop the late Baroque style of Scarlatti and Steffani, when his contemporaries on the Continent were developing the Pre-Classical style. Handel was able to adhere to an outmoded style because London was in many ways isolated from the main stream of contemporary Italian opera.<sup>29</sup> But he was not ignorant of the new Neapolitan style, and he experimented with it in certain operas from the 1730's, such as *Porro*, *Ezio*, and *Ariodante*. When Handel abandoned opera, he ceased to experiment with the new style, and stubbornly championed the late Baroque style, bringing it to a culmination in his English oratorios.

During the 1720's and 1730's, Handel's opera arias would have appeared very conservative to his Italian contemporaries. Handelian melody is derived from a melodic style that was developed at the beginning of the eighteenth century by composers such as Scarlatti, Corelli, Steffani, and Bononcini. This melodic style is characteristic of the late Baroque rather than the Pre-Classical era. Handel conceived his melodies in long irregular lines spun out from short motives, rather than as neatly balanced melodic phrases. The melodic contours are more

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<sup>29</sup>Michael F. Robinson, *Opera before Mozart* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), p. 122.





disjunct and instrumentally conceived compared to the conjunct, vocally conceived melodies of his contemporaries.<sup>30</sup> Handel did not decorate his melodies with the written-out ornaments and appoggiaturas that were so beloved by the Neapolitan composers, but left them simple and restrained. The performance practice of the time would not have greatly altered the "bel simple" of Handel's melodies, because the improvised ornaments would not be fully employed until the da capo repeat.<sup>31</sup> The da capo repeats in the arias of his contemporaries would have been extremely ornate because the singers would be applying ornaments upon an already ornamented line. In contrast to his contemporaries, who consistently avoided strong accents through the use of syncopations, Handel preferred simple, strongly accentuated rhythms, with a preponderance of repeated rhythmic patterns and dotted rhythms.<sup>32</sup>

Although melody is of great importance in Handel's arias, a contrapuntal texture is usually maintained because of the independently active bass lines. In addition, the instrumental accompaniments are often treated contrapuntally rather than harmonically as is usually the case. Thus, the majority of Handel's arias are written in two-, three-, or four-part counterpoint rather than with a single melody and

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<sup>30</sup>Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," p. 142.

<sup>31</sup>See Winton Dean, "Vocal Embellishment in a Handel Aria," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music: A Tribute to Karl Geiringer on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. H. C. Robbins-Landon (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), pp. 151-59; and G. F. Handel, *Three Ornamented Arias from Ottone*, ed. Winton Dean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). These studies reproduce Handel's ornamented versions of several arias with the originals in order to illustrate Handel's approach to ornamentation.

<sup>32</sup>Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," pp. 84-85.



a chordal accompaniment. The active basses also account for the rapid rate of chordal change; in Handel's arias, the harmony usually changes every beat of the measure, rather than every measure or every few measures, as is common in most Pre-Classical music. Handel's harmonic style is basically diatonic like that of his contemporaries, but chromatic harmony is introduced in scenes of intense drama.<sup>33</sup> Because of these numerous Baroque characteristics, Handel's music might have appeared heavy and ponderous, and perhaps even unpolished and crude, to a contemporary audience nourished on the Rococo elegance of Vinci, Leo, Pergolesi, and Hasse.<sup>34</sup>

The standardization of key, tempo, and metre, which is such a conspicuous element of style in the operas of most eighteenth-century composers, is not evident in the operas of Handel. Handel's approach to tempo, metre, and key is similar to that of Scarlatti. Although the major mode is favored, there is a large proportion of arias in the minor mode. For example, of the 104 da capo arias in *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, sixty-three arias are in the major mode, and forty-one are in the minor mode. Thus, two out of every five arias are in the minor mode rather than two out of every twenty-five as was the usual proportion in the operas of his contemporaries. In addition, rather than restricting slow tempos to two or three arias in each opera, Handel made regular use of arias in slow tempos. For

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<sup>33</sup>Hugo Leichtentritt, "Handel's Harmonic Art," *Musical Quarterly* 21 (1935):208-223.

<sup>34</sup>See Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," pp. 100-102, 119-120, and 141-146, for comparisons of aria settings by Handel with those of Vivaldi, Vinci, and Hasse.



example, of the 104 da capo arias in the above-named operas, twenty-nine are slow arias, twenty-three are moderate, and fifty-two are fast. The tempo indications are very straightforward; with a few exceptions, most slow arias are marked *Largo* or *Larghetto*, moderate arias are marked *Andante*, and fast arias are marked *Allegro*. Handel seems to have had a particular fondness for slow arias, the *Largos* and *Larghetts*, which are distinguished by their high degree of musical invention and depth of emotional expression.<sup>35</sup> The most common metre in Handel's opera arias is the heroic 4/4, followed by 3/4 and 3/8; of the 104 da capo arias in the above named operas, fifty-three are in 4/4 metre, seventeen are in 3/4 and fourteen are in 3/8. Following the example of Scarlatti, Handel continued to use compound metres such as the 12/8 of the *siciliano* and the 6/8 of the gigue, although they were in disfavor with most contemporary opera composers because of their close association with popular music. The above-named operas contain ten arias in 12/8 metre and six in 6/8 metre. The *siciliano* aria has an important role in Handel's operas because it is used to depict affections of melancholy or sorrow while its major-mode equivalent, the *pastorale*, is used, appropriately enough, in pastoral or nature scenes.

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<sup>35</sup>Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 419.



## Handel and the Da Capo Aria

### Formal Structure

In the development of opera, Handel could never be considered a radical reformer. In contrast to the striking innovations of the English oratorios, in the genre of *opera seria*, Handel seems to have accepted most of the operatic conventions of the time. Foremost among these conventions was the supremacy of the da capo aria. The following statistics from the operas *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina* prove that the da capo aria is the most important musical element in Handel's operas.

Figure 3. Classification of the musical numbers in the operas *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*.

	<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	<i>Tamerlano</i>	<i>Rodelinda</i>
Da capo arias	28	24	26
Da capo ensembles	2	3	1
Ariettas	3	3	0
Non-da capo ensembles	0	1	0
Accompanied recitatives	3	5	2
<i>Scene</i>	1	1	2
Choruses	2	1	1
Sinfonias	3	1	0
Total	42	39	32

  

	<i>Orlando</i>	<i>Ariodante</i>	<i>Alcina</i>
Da capo arias	19	23	25
Da capo ensembles	1	1	1
Non-da capo arias	1	2	1
Non-da capo ensembles	3	3	0
Ariettas	3	4	2
Accompanied recitatives	8	1	1
<i>Scene</i>	1	0	0
Choruses	1	3	4
Sinfonias	3	4	1
Ballets	0	3	3
Total	40	44	38

Handel's conservatism is evident in his treatment of the da capo aria. The form of Handel's da capo arias is basically the same as that used by his contemporaries, although there are some differences.





Handel's arias characteristically begin with an orchestral ritornello. The ritornello serves as an introduction for the singer and at the same time establishes the mood or affect of the aria.<sup>36</sup> The most important function of the ritornello is that it presents the basic material from which the aria is constructed. The ritornello in Handel's arias can be regarded as the theme or exposition of the aria. It can consist of a single theme, but more often, it is made up of several themes or motives. The structure of Handel's ritornellos is highly varied, but certain generalizations can be made. Characteristically the first motive is the most important for it provides the basis of the vocal melody, although usually one of the secondary motives will also be employed in its composition. The middle of the ritornello generally contains some type of sequential motive which will be used in the coloratura passages or will remain in the orchestra as an independent accompanimental figure. Because of the contrapuntal textures of Handel's arias, the basses often take an active role in the thematic presentation. The various motives of the ritornello are sometimes subtly related through the use of common musical material (see the discussion on the thematic development in the aria "Morraì sì"). In length, the opening ritornello can vary from one to as many as twenty measures depending upon the tempo of the aria and the amount of material presented. The ritornello usually cadences in the tonic before the vocal entry, to give prominence to the soloist's opening phrase. During the first vocal paragraph, the voice takes up the material of the

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<sup>36</sup>Anthony Lewis, "Handel and the Aria," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 85 (1958-59):97.



ritornello, and expands and varies it. Often the material of the orchestral ritornello is modified because its instrumental character is not suitable to the voice.<sup>37</sup> In many ways the opening ritornello and the first vocal paragraph are similar to the double exposition in a classical concerto.

Handel adopted the usual binary structure in the first sections of most of his arias, but not with the consistency followed by his contemporaries. Although he favored the usual two complete settings of the aria's first strophe, separated by an intermediate ritornello, many A sections contain three or more text-settings. For example, of the 104 da capo arias and ensembles in *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, fifty-seven have two text-settings, thirty-seven have three text-settings, and eight have more than three. In the arias with three text-settings, this may result in a ternary arrangement of three vocal paragraphs separated by ritornellos, or else the binary form is maintained by grouping two text-settings into a single half. In the latter case, the extra text-setting will often serve as a coda to the second vocal paragraph.

As in the arias of his contemporaries, the key scheme in Handel's arias is very predictable. The first vocal paragraph will cadence in the dominant for arias in the major mode and in the relative major for arias in the minor mode. For example, fifty-five of the sixty-three da capo arias in the major mode in *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina* cadence in or on the dominant at the end of the first vocal

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<sup>37</sup>Anthony Lewis, "Handel and the Aria," p. 97.



paragraph. The key scheme of arias in the minor mode is not quite as predictable. For example, twenty-two of the forty-one da capo arias in the minor mode in the above-named operas cadence in or on the relative major at the end of the first vocal paragraph. As in the arias of Scarlatti, the other possible modulation in the minor mode is to the dominant minor; Handel usually reserved this modulation, with its conspicuous absence of major-mode coloring, for certain important laments.

The first complete text-setting is followed by an intermediate ritornello for orchestra, which is usually based on one of the motives from the opening ritornello. This ritornello either remains in the dominant or the relative major of the previous cadence, or returns to the tonic. The intermediate ritornello rarely exceeds four measures, and in certain arias, especially those in slow tempo, it is omitted entirely. Sixteen of the 104 da capo arias in *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina* omit the intermediate ritornello.

Coloratura is an important structural element in Handel's arias. Unlike his contemporaries, who usually employ one lengthy coloratura passage in each vocal paragraph of the first section, Handel's treatment of the coloratura is very unpredictable. The arrangement of the coloratura passages has an important effect upon the structure of Handel's arias. While some arias follow the usual arrangement and employ one coloratura passage in each of the two or three vocal paragraphs (as in twenty-two of the 104 da capo arias in *Giulio Cesare*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, and *Alcina*), in other arias, the coloratura will be reserved for one or two passages in the second vocal paragraph (as in eighteen of the 104 da capo arias in the above-named operas).



Some arias will include an additional coloratura passage in the second vocal paragraph (as in thirteen of the 104 arias), while others will contain two or more coloratura passages in each paragraph (as in eleven of the 104 arias). A significant portion of Handel's arias are set syllabically and contain no florid passages; coloratura is avoided in twenty-three of the 104 da capo arias in the above-named operas.

Coloratura passages occur on important, descriptive, or sonorous words, and usually on the same word in each vocal paragraph. Because of its importance and sonority, the final word of the aria strophe is often set as coloratura. For example, in twenty-nine of the fifty-four da capo arias in *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda*, the final word of the first aria strophe is set as coloratura. When the final words in both strophes are set as coloratura, the rhyme scheme of the aria text is emphasized by the music.

Besides this structural function, the coloratura passages in Handel's arias have additional functions. The most obvious is that of supplying part of the aria's virtuoso element which was so beloved by the singers and the public. Often the coloratura passages are tailored by the composer to display the talents of a particular singer or a particular vocal range. But Handel seldom exploits virtuosity for its own sake, and his coloratura passages tend to be shorter and less extravagant than those of his contemporaries. Even in the *aria di bravura*, the coloratura passages seldom exceed six measures in length, and in many arias the coloratura is relegated to short melismas of a single measure. Perhaps the reason for Handel's occasional use of a tripartite structure, with three settings of the first strophe in the A section, is that it permitted large-scale form without the use of





the long coloratura passages of his contemporaries. The coloratura also plays an important role in the thematic development. Usually the coloratura of an aria is based on a motive from the ritornello and is developed sequentially. In contrast to many of his contemporaries, Handel exploited the coloratura for its expressive possibilities. In Handel's arias, coloratura is employed "to heighten the emotional effect."<sup>38</sup> Often coloratura passages are placed at the end of each vocal paragraph as a means of achieving climax. Handel's expressive use of coloratura can be clearly seen in the role of Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare*; in all of her arias except "Piangerò la sorte mia," which contains no coloratura, the main coloratura passage occurs at the end of the second vocal paragraph in order to create a sense of climax prior to the cadence. Although there are some arias—especially some of the more routine castrato *bravura* arias—in which the coloratura is merely a superficial addition, in most of Handel's arias it is an integral part of the total musical conception.

The second vocal paragraph often begins with a shortened re-statement of the head motive in either the new key, the dominant or relative major, or the tonic. In contrast to the first vocal paragraph, this one does not begin strongly in a key, but moves away from the key established in the previous cadence through sequences. The second vocal paragraph can be regarded as the development section in Handel's arias. Motives or motivic fragments are expanded and developed sequentially and are varied by rearrangement and combination. Besides the usual sequential treatment, other developmental techniques

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<sup>38</sup>Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," p. 98.



include intervallic extension, inversion, and imitation. This development is not, however, as systematic as it is in the cantata arias of Bach or in the opera arias of Bononcini, but is free and flexible, often approaching the spontaneity of improvisation.<sup>39</sup> Because of the unpredictable and unsystematic nature of the development, it is one of the more interesting aspects of Handel's arias. Sometimes an additional key is established before the return of the tonic, usually the dominant or subdominant in minor-mode arias and the supertonic for major-mode arias. This type of secondary modulation usually occurs in slow arias in the minor mode.

The vocal cadenzas in Handel's arias are indicated in a manner similar to that used by Scarlatti. The final phrase of the second vocal paragraph is usually set off from the main melody by a rest and is accompanied only by the continuo. The improvised vocal cadenza probably occurred during the rests prior to the cadential phrase, rather than on the tonic six-four chord of the cadence as was common in the arias of Hasse. Sometimes this position of the cadenza is indicated by placing a *fermata* over the final note of this phrase. The A section concludes with a return of the ritornello in the tonic, which serves as the recapitulation to this section. This version of the ritornello is usually shortened and varied by the omission and rearrangement of the motives. The plasticity of Handel's ritornellos is such that the motives can be freely rearranged, varied, and omitted without damaging the overall essence of the ritornello. In fact, this variation adds new dimensions to the aria's main theme and can be

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<sup>39</sup> Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," p. 76.



regarded as an important developmental device.<sup>40</sup>

The middle section of Handel's da capo arias consists of either one or two settings of the aria's second strophe. Even when there are two settings of the second strophe, rarely does the B section adopt the independent formal structure of the A section, with its clear key areas set off by text-settings and ritornellos. In contrast to the A section, the B section is usually quite short and is modulatory in character. In the middle section of his arias, Handel followed the modulatory scheme established by Scarlatti. The B sections of arias in the major mode usually begin in the submediant and modulate to the mediant. In the operas *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, forty-three out of sixty-three arias in the major mode begin on the submediant and modulate to the mediant, while another ten begin on a key other than the submediant and modulate to the mediant. The B sections of arias in the minor mode are again less regular, but there is a tendency to modulate to the dominant, often from the mediant. Twenty-eight of the forty-one arias in the minor mode from the above-named operas modulate to the dominant before the da capo repeat; of these twenty-eight, seventeen begin on the mediant (relative major). When there are two text-settings, there is often an intermediate cadence at the end of the first, either on the submediant or supertonic in arias in the major mode, or on the mediant or its dominant in arias in the minor mode. Because this section explores keys not yet established in the first section, "a satisfactory tonal balance is preserved over the whole aria": I-V-I, vi-iii, I-V-I: or i-III-i, III-v,

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<sup>40</sup>Lewis, "Handel and the Aria," p. 97.



i-III-i.<sup>41</sup> Further contrast between the two sections is obtained by a change of texture and orchestration. Usually the orchestra is thinned out in the second section, often to mere continuo accompaniment. For example, the orchestra is reduced in the B sections to forty-one of the 104 da capo arias in *Giulio Cesare*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, and *Alcina*; in twenty-seven of these arias, the instrumentation is reduced to continuo only.

The B sections in Handel's arias from the 1720's are on the whole longer and more developed than the B sections in his arias from the 1730's. The reason for this difference is that during the 1720's, Handel preferred to set the second strophe twice and to include one or two brief coloratura passages, whereas during the 1730's, the second strophe was usually given a single setting, and coloratura was often avoided. Of the fifty-four da capo arias in *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda*, twenty-four contain two settings of the second strophe, and twenty-nine include one or two coloratura passages; of the fifty da capo arias in *Ariodante* and *Alcina*, twelve contain two settings of the second strophe and nineteen include one or two coloratura passages. Handel's perfunctory treatment of the B section during the 1730's reflects contemporary developments on the Continent. But this imbalanced effect is sometimes avoided. In certain arias of this period, Handel experimented with abbreviated da capo forms in which the A section is significantly shortened. The arias "Invida sorte avara misero," "Io ti bacio," "Mi Palpita il core," and "Al sen ti stringo e parto" from *Ariodante* are excellent examples of this shortened da capo form.

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<sup>41</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 156.





Continuity between the two sections is achieved through the use of common musical material. Usually motivic fragments, or more often rhythmic figures, are developed at greater length in the B section. In the second section, the development is even freer and more unpredictable than in the A section. Sometimes a secondary motive or motivic fragment from the A section will assume primary importance in the B section, which will in turn modify its significance and stature in the da capo repeat. Often new material of a neutral or slightly contrasting character is introduced in the B section. This new material is not intended to establish a contrasting affection but rather to enhance the return of the basic affection in the da capo repeat.

The final vocal phrase of the B section, like that of the A section, is usually set off from the main melody by rests that allow the singer the opportunity to display his talents in a second improvised cadenza. Following the vocal cadence, there will be either a full da capo repeat of the A section or a shortened version of the ritornello followed by a *dal segno* indication which leads to the first vocal entry of the A section. Of the 104 da capo arias in *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, forty-six have *dal segno* repeats which result in a shortening of the opening ritornello.

The form of the typical da capo aria of Handel can be summarized as follows:

Figure 4. Formal plan of the Handelian da capo aria.

A Section	major mode	minor mode
opening ritornello	I	i
first text-setting	I-V	i-III
intermediate ritornello	I or V	i or III
second text-setting	?(ii)-I	?(iv,v)-i
closing ritornello	I	i



B Section	major mode	minor mode
first (and second)	vi-iii	III-v
text-setting(s)		
Shortened ritornello and <i>dal segno</i> , or da capo repeat of the A section.		

This basic form can be found in the majority of the arias from Handel's mature operas. When compared to the aria forms of his predecessor Scarlatti, and his younger contemporary Hasse, the form as cultivated by Handel represents a middle stage in the development of the da capo aria. While Handel accepted the expansive form and systematic key structure found in Hasse's da capo arias, he retained the more flexible treatment of the text and the coloratura characteristic of Scarlatti's arias.

#### Thematic Development

Only a few generalizations have been made with regard to the development in the da capo arias of Handel because of its unpredictable and unsystematic nature. In order to better understand Handel's developmental techniques, it is necessary to analyze several representative arias. The formal structure is also considered in order to show how closely the examples conform to the model which has been outlined above.

The aria "Morrai sì" from Act I of *Rodelinda* is a fine example of the motivic development in the da capo arias of Handel. In this aria, Rodelinda threatens the scheming Garibaldo with death if she ascends the throne. Handel seems to have toned down the violence of the text, which would have been slightly out of character for his heroine, and concentrates on the affection of heroic defiance by writing a coloratura vengeance aria in E major, *Allegro*, 4/4 metre.



However, this aria is no mere virtuoso show piece.

The sixteen-measure ritornello theme contains four short motives, of which the first and fourth are the most important (Example 2). At first glance, the theme appears to be merely a string of contrasting melodic fragments, but on closer examination, all of the motives are seen as an organic expansion of the opening material. The four motives are derived from the descending six-note scale passage of the head motive; this is first presented, or rather suggested, in the bass in drawn-out quarter notes in measure 1, before it is taken up by the violins in its standard form at measure 2. The second motive has the descending six-note scale in both voices, outlined in the violins by intervallic extensions and in the basses by the repeated notes at the beginning of each sequential phrase. The third motive is the descending six-note scale, with its accents displaced; the motive is played in unison with *échappée* ornaments in the violins. The fourth motive introduces elements of contrast, especially with the triadic counter-motive in the bass; but the violin motive, which will later become two separate motives, contains a descending four-note scale. This four-note scale is outlined in the varied return of the second motive before the cadence of the ritornello (see Example 2). The predominance of the descending scale, especially in the orchestral part, is perhaps descriptive of Rodelinda's inner thoughts. She is ascending the throne only to bring about the downfall of both Garibaldo and his master Grimoaldo.

Although the aria is lightly scored for unison violins and continuo, it is written throughout in two- and three-part counterpoint. The first complete text-setting consists of a shortened variation of



Example 2. *Rodelinda*, "Morrai sì," meas. 1-18.

*Allegro.*

(Violini) unisoni.

RODELINDA.

(Bassi.)

Morrai sì. l'empia tu te sta

the opening ritornello. The first motive is altered melodically by the singer (Example 2); the second motive is played in an extended version by the orchestra, while the voice adds a countermelody; the third motive is omitted; and the fourth motive is melodically varied as a coloratura passage which is extended to cadence in the expected dominant. In the A section, Handel chooses the word "trono" as the privileged word for the coloratura passages because of its importance and sonority.

The intermediate ritornello is a shortened statement of the opening motive in the dominant. This is followed by the second complete text-setting which is dominated by the fourth motive. After another varied statement of the head motive, a fragment from motive four is set in imitation between the voice and the continuo; the violins then enter with the complete motive while the bass countermotive is placed in the voice part. Midway through the coloratura passage, the third





motive and its inversion are taken up by the voice, doubled by the violins and the belated entry of the bass.

Example 3. *Rodelinda*, "Morrai sì," meas. 31-44.

The intermediate ritornello, which consists of motive two, is elided to the third complete text-setting by extending the bass motive a bar into the soloist's statement of yet another variant of the head motive (Example 4). Because of the intermediate ritornello and the coloratura passage, this text repetition could be considered as a third vocal paragraph, or as a large coda to the second.

Example 4. *Rodelinda*, "Morrai sì," meas. 45-48.

Like the other two coloratura passages, this one is placed at the end of the vocal paragraph as a means of creating climax. The final cadence, accompanied only by continuo and marked *Adagio*, allows the soloist the freedom to improvise a cadenza. The closing ritornello is contracted to six measures by omitting motives one and two and by



shortening motive three; dotted rhythms are introduced to enliven the cadential figure.

The B section consists of one setting of the second strophe, and is scored for only voice and continuo. The entire section is only fourteen-and-a-half measures long, as opposed to the A section which is sixty-one-and-a-half measures long. Following the usual key scheme, the B section begins on the submediant and modulates to the mediant. Although the soloist is given new material, the two coloratura passages are based upon two motivic fragments; one is a variant of the second motive, and the other is taken from a vocal phrase in the coda of the A section (Example 5). The thematic development is continued in the bass; a fragment of the fourth motive and its countermotive are set in short sequences above which the vocal melody unfolds.

Example 5. *Rodelinda*, "Morrai sì," meas. 66-72.

As in the A section, the final cadence is set off from the main melody by a rest and is marked *Adagio* for the second vocal cadenza. Instead of repeating the entire opening ritornello da capo, the orchestra plays the head motive which leads to the first vocal entry by a *dal segno* repeat.

The aria "Di, cor mio" from Act I of *Alcina* represents a more relaxed but equally valid approach to development in Handel's da capo arias. In this aria, Alcina reminisces to Ruggiero about their first



meeting and the discovery of their mutual passion. The aria is a love song in B-flat major, *Andante Larghetto*, 4/4 metre and is scored for four-part strings.

The two-measure opening ritornello presents the aria's main theme—in this case a single motive—and a short motivic link, which is used to elide the opening ritornello to the vocal entry.

Example 6. *Alcina*, "Di, cor mio," meas. 1-4.

*Andante larghetto.*

Violino I. Oboe I. Violino II. Oboe II. Viola. ALCINA. Bassi.

Di, cor mi-o, quan to ta-ma-i,  
Sag, o Theurer, wie sehr du lieb mir,

The first text-setting can be regarded as a melodic expansion of the theme; the voice takes up the theme and then continues where the orchestra left off. In between the short repeated phrases of the vocal melody, the motivic link of the ritornello is introduced by the violins (Example 7). Handel probably intended this motive, with its parallel thirds in slurred groups of twos, as a nature motive to depict the fountain and the brook mentioned in the text.

Example 7. *Alcina*, "Di, cor mio," meas. 5-8.

mostra il bo-sco, il fon-te, il ri-o, do-ve tac-qui e so-spi-ra-i,  
srag die Hai-ne, die Quel-len, die Bä-che, wo ich stum war und sehnend seuf-ste,





The short repeated phrases of the vocal melody build to a final phrase, which is extended by a coloratura passage and cadences in the expected dominant key. A varied restatement of the opening theme in the dominant serves as the intermediate orchestral ritornello.

The second complete text-setting begins on the dominant with a free variation of the melody from the first vocal paragraph. Handel continues this development by taking two fragments from the melody of the first vocal paragraph (see Example 7) and setting them through a series of combinations and rearrangements. The aria comes to a surprising climax when the motivic link—which up until now has been used only by the violins, between the vocal phrases—is suddenly taken up by both the voice and the orchestra in imitative rising sequences.

Example 8. *Alcina*, "Di, cor mio," meas. 26-30.

The musical score for Example 8 shows measures 26-30 of the aria "Di, cor mio" from Handel's *Alcina*. The score is written for a vocal line (soprano) and an instrumental line (likely violin). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "ra, ie so, spi, ra, seufste, sehnend seuf" and "pria di ste, eh' ich". The instrumental line features a complex coloratura passage with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

This coloratura passage, which is both expressive and developmental in function, leads to the final cadential phrase. The improvised vocal cadenza occurs on this final phrase, which is accompanied only by continuo and is separated from the main melody by a rest (see Example 8). The cadence is elided to the closing ritornello; and thus all parts of the A section are woven into a continuous whole through a series of elisions. In order to give the A section a suitable conclusion and to compensate for the sudden prominence of a secondary figure, the





ritornello is extended by setting the motivic link in a free stretto in all voices.

Example 9. *Alcina*, "Di, cor mio," meas. 31-36.

Although the ritornello is expanded by only two measures, this addition provides the aria with a very satisfying conclusion. The way in which the motivic link assumes primary importance is a good example of the unpredictable nature of Handelian development.

The B section, which is accompanied only by continuo, consists of one setting of the aria's second strophe. The key scheme is slightly irregular, with the entire section remaining within the submediant. Although the vocal line to this section makes reference to the head motive, the thematic development takes place in the bass where the accompanimental figure from the main theme is set in sequence.

Example 10. *Alcina*, "Di, cor mio," meas. 36-39.

The final cadential phrase, separated from the main melody by a rest, allows for the second improvised vocal cadenza. Then follows the da capo repeat.



Cleopatra's aria "Se pietà di me non senti" from *Giulio Cesare* presents a very different approach to thematic development. This *Largo* aria in F-sharp minor, 4/4 metre, is one of the finest examples of the lament in Baroque opera. In this aria, as in many of Handel's laments, the orchestra is given an independent part rather than sharing the same thematic material with the voice. The orchestral part is based on two short motives: the primary motive is continually developed by the unison first and second violins, while the secondary motive is periodically taken up by the basses. During the ritornellos, obbligato bassoons in the tenor register are added, creating a rich five-part contrapuntal texture.

Example 11. *Giulio Cesare*, "Se pietà di me non senti," meas. 1-8.

*Largo.* ①

Violino I. II.

Violino III.

Viola.

Bassons.

CLEOPATRA.

Bassi.

col Basso.

Se pie-tà



With the vocal entry, the orchestral part is simplified, although it retains its independence and importance throughout the aria. The vocal line, like the bassoon line, is treated as an obbligato melody which participates in a duet with the first and second violins. In spite of this independence between the voice and the orchestra, there exist certain subtle thematic relationships: the head motive from which the vocal melody expands is an inversion of the violin motive, while the vocal melismas are based on the cadential passages of the opening ritornello (see Example 11). The vocal melody, which is typical of Handel's lamenting style, consists of short phrases separated by rests which gradually expand to longer phrases, culminating in an expansive phrase of six measures at the end of the first section. Throughout the aria, the melody hovers around the unstable sixth and seventh degrees of the minor scale, and this accounts for much of the chromaticism in this aria. The chromatic melodies are supported by equally chromatic harmonies which are generated by the numerous dissonant appoggiaturas and pedals in the bass. Besides the chromaticism, the lamenting character of this aria is enhanced by the continuous descending motion of the bass lines and the "drooping" contours of the ever-present violin motive.

The first section contains three text-settings which are grouped into two vocal paragraphs separated by an intermediate ritornello; the third text-setting coincides with the extended six-measure phrase at the end of the first section. Expressive melismas are employed at the end of each vocal paragraph as a means of creating climax; appropriately enough, the second melisma is more extended than the first. Only at these climactic points in the aria do the violins and voice share





the same thematic material. Because the aria is an important lament, the conventional tonal structure is altered to create a "dark" tragic atmosphere devoid of any major-mode coloring. Instead of the usual modulation to the relative major, the first text-setting cadences in the dominant minor, and the second text-setting cadences in the sub-dominant minor.

The B section to this aria is relatively expansive and well organized, consisting of two text-settings separated by a brief orchestral interlude. During this section, the characteristic violin motive is omitted, and the orchestra is given an accompanimental role. Although contrast is created in the first vocal paragraph of this section through the use of the major mode and diatonicism, the minor mode and chromaticism return with renewed vigor in the second vocal paragraph (see Example 12). At the end of the B section, Handel again creates the expectation of a cadence in the relative major by strongly emphasizing its dominant, only to frustrate this expectation by a deceptive cadence followed by a melisma which deflects the tonality back into the darkness of the dominant minor. A shortened variation of the opening ritornello leads to a *dal segno* repeat of the first section. Example 12. *Giulio Cesare*, "Se pietà di me non senti," meas. 42-46.

pa-cea mi-e-tor-ment-i, o-quest'al-ma spi-re, o-quest'al - - - ma spi-re, rò, o-quest'al-ma, o-quest'

6 6 4 3 7 3 5 4 6 6 4 5 4 6 6 7 6 6





## Orchestration

Although the treatment of the orchestra in Handel's opera arias is similar to that of his contemporaries, there are some important differences. Handel's orchestration is basically conservative, and is derived from the techniques he had learned in Hamburg and Rome during the first decade of the eighteenth century. In appearance, a Handel opera score from the 1730's is more likely to resemble one by Keiser or Scarlatti from the beginning of the eighteenth century rather than a contemporary score by Vinci or Hasse.

One of the conservative traits of Handel's orchestration is his persistence in writing *basso continuo* arias long after they had become obsolete in contemporary opera. While the early operas contain more arias of this type, throughout the 1720's and 1730's, most of Handel's operas contain at least one continuo aria. For example, one aria and two ariettas in *Giulio Cesare*, two arias in *Tamerlano*, one arietta in *Orlando*, and two arias in *Alcina* have only continuo accompaniment. In his continuo arias, Handel often includes the string orchestra in the final ritornello of the da capo to create contrast and a sense of climax; the continuo arias from *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, and *Alcina* employ extended ritornellos for orchestra at the end of the da capo.

As in the opera arias of his contemporaries, the most basic accompaniment in Handel's opera arias is the string orchestra and continuo. In fifty of the 104 da capo arias in *Giulio Cesare*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, and *Alcina*, the orchestra is made up entirely of strings and continuo. In many of the arias with string accompaniment, Handel did not bother to indicate the instruments, probably because the use of a string orchestra was assumed. One of the conservative aspects of Handel's



orchestration is that he never consistently adopted the four-part string orchestra which had become the standard accompaniment in the arias of his contemporaries.<sup>42</sup> Following the example of older masters such as Scarlatti, Steffani, and Keiser, Handel divided his orchestra into two, three, or four parts. Of the fifty da capo arias with string accompaniment in the above-named operas, twenty are scored for four-part strings, eight for three-part strings, and twenty-two for two-part strings. Not only did this create variety in texture but also in scoring; in the arias for two-part strings, and in certain arias for three-part strings, the absence of the violas affected the overall sound of the orchestra. During the 1730's, when Handel was experimenting with the Neapolitan style, there is a marked preference for four-part string accompaniment. For example, eleven arias in *Ariodante* are scored for four-part strings as opposed to only four in *Giulio Cesare* and seven in *Rodelinda*.

Although the use of a two- and three-part string orchestra may give the impression that the texture in Handel's arias is thinner than in those of his contemporaries, actually the opposite is true. Because of the standard doubling procedure of his contemporaries, the four-part orchestra could usually be reduced to a melody and two-part accompaniment. When compared to his contemporaries, Handel seems to have conceived his orchestral accompaniments more in terms of contrapuntal lines than as homophonic chords. Thus when he writes for two-part orchestra, there are often two real parts, and when he writes for four-part orchestra there are often four real parts. Because of this

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<sup>42</sup>Robinson, "Porpora's Operas for London," p. 86.



contrapuntal approach, Handel did not follow the standard doubling procedure. Rarely does Handel allow the violins to double the voice as in contemporary practice, and when the violas are used, they are always given an independent part rather than merely doubling the bass an octave above.

The basic opera orchestra of Handel is completed by the addition of oboes and bassoons. Of the 104 da capo arias in *Giulio Cesare*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, and *Alcina*, thirty-three are scored for oboes, bassoons, and strings. Although Handel frequently employed oboes and bassoons, they seldom are given obbligato parts as they are in the arias of Bach and Steffani. Instead, the oboes and bassoons double the violins and basso continuo. Handel employed this doubling in order to strengthen and color the sound of the string orchestra. Usually Handel would not bother to write out separate staves for the oboes and bassoons, but merely assigned the oboes to the violin staves, while the doubling of the bass by the bassoons would be assumed. Another way in which Handel indicated the use of oboes and bassoons was simply by inscribing the word *tutti* beside the upper staves; *tutti* implied the full orchestra which, in the case of Handel, consisted of oboes, bassoons, and strings. On occasion, the oboes are given independent parts, although even then there is much duplication of the violin lines. For example, the oboes and bassoons are given independent parts in five of the thirty-three arias in the above-named operas scored for the basic orchestra. Besides the usual role of providing bass accompaniment to the oboes and the flutes, occasionally the bassoons are given brief solo passages in the tenor register. These solo passages often occur in laments such as "Se pietà di me non senti" from *Giulio*



*Cesare* and "Scherza infida, in grembo al drudo" from *Ariodante* or *pastorales* such as "Con rauco mormorio piangono" from *Rodelinda* and "Se in fiorito ameno prato" from *Giulio Cesare*.

The most common addition to Handel's operatic orchestra is the flutes. Flutes are employed in four arias in *Giulio Cesare*, three arias and a *scena* in *Rodelinda*, two arias and an arietta in *Tamerlano*, and one aria each in *Orlando*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*. Handel used both the recorders and the transverse flutes in spite of the fact that the recorders were at this time becoming obsolete and were being superseded by their more modern counterpart. The two instruments are not interchangeable. In the scores, Handel differentiated between the recorder, which he called the *flauto* and the transverse flute which he called the *traversa*. Recorders are often employed in pairs in pastoral or nature arias, while the transverse flute is usually employed as a solo instrument in sorrowful or melancholic arias. For example, the laments "Priva son d'ogni conforto," and "Piangerò la sorte mia" from *Giulio Cesare*, and "Ombre, piante, urne funeste!" from *Rodelinda* employ a solo transverse flute, while the pastoral aria "Verdi piante, erbe liete" from *Orlando* and the nature aria "Un zeffiro spirò" from *Rodelinda* employ two recorders. For special effects, the recorders are sometimes combined with the transverse flute as in the aria "Con rauco mormorio" from *Rodelinda* and the duet "Vivo in te" from *Tamerlano*. Occasionally other types of recorders are used as in the "Tamburino" from the finale to *Alcina*, where a *flauto piccolo* is employed as an obbligato instrument.

Although oboes and bassoons occur with greater frequency than do the flutes, the flutes are often given independent parts rather than doubling the violins. Handel used the flutes primarily for their color





while the oboes were used for both their color and their volume. Handel's coloristic treatment of the flutes is best seen in those arias in which they are introduced at some point during the aria rather than at the beginning. At a time when the orchestration of an aria was determined by the opening ritornello, this type of unconventional and essentially modern approach to orchestration can be very arresting. For example, in the pastoral lament "Con rauco mormorio" from *Rodelinda*, the recorders and flutes are first introduced in the B section to depict nature echoing the laments of Bertarido, while in the pastoral aria "Verdi piante, erbette liete" from *Orlando*, the recorders make a belated entry during the second vocal paragraph, providing a new counterpoint to the vocal melody. This technique is expanded in the aria "Mio bel tesoro" from *Alcina*. The aria begins as a continuo aria, with the usual motto ritornello for continuo, but the recorders are introduced after the first vocal entry, alternating with the voice in echo phrases; seven measures later the string orchestra enters with a belated ritornello in the unexpected subdominant minor key; after five measures, the recorders join the strings creating a rich six-part accompaniment (see Example 13). During the final ritornello, the recorders are omitted, and oboes are introduced to double the violins. Many of Handel's operas contain one or two such arias, which stand out for their colorful and innovative orchestration.

Most of Handel's operas require brass instruments. During Handel's early operatic career, the only brass instruments required were the trumpets, but beginning with the Royal Academy period, both trumpets and horns are used, often within the same opera.<sup>43</sup> Because of their

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<sup>43</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 191.



Example 13. *Alcina*, "Mio bel tesoro," meas. 5-18.

Mio bel te-so-ro,  
Dem thea-ren He-sen,  
fe-del son i-o,  
das ich er-le-sen,  
al ben-chea-do-ro,  
bin ich er-ge-ben,  
all' i-dol  
ihr weih' ich

mi-o promet-to fe,  
Le-ben Treu' ihr und Pflicht,  
all' i-dol mi-o promet-to fe, (ma non a te.)  
ihr weih' ich Le-ben Treu' ihr und Pflicht (dir a-ber nicht!)

Viol. I senza Oboe.  
Viol. II senza Oboe.

strong programmatic connotations, Handel used the brass instruments with restraint. Handel reserved the trumpets for martial scenes and the horns for hunting scenes. Both horns and trumpets could also be employed in ceremonial scenes. Because of these restrictions, brass instruments are employed only two or three times in the course of an opera, usually in one of the arias, in the *coro*, and perhaps in a sinfonia. For example, horns are employed in an aria, a sinfonia, and two *cori* in *Giulio Cesare*, the *coro* in *Rodelinda*, an aria in *Orlando*, and in an aria and a *coro* in *Alcina*. In the *cori* and sinfonias, the trumpets and horns are usually treated as orchestral instruments to strengthen and color the strings and woodwinds, while in the arias, they can be introduced either as orchestral instruments or as obbligate instruments with brilliant solo parts. For example, the two horns



in the aria "Non fù gia men forte Alcide" from *Orlando* are blended coloristically with the orchestra of strings and oboes, while the solo horn in the aria "Va tacito e nascosto" from *Giulio Cesare* is given a virtuoso part which concertizes with the voice and string orchestra. Handel did not use brass instruments frequently, but when he did, he treated them in a brilliant and often innovative manner. In *Giulio Cesare*, Handel employed two pairs of horns in A and D, in the *cori* and a sinfonia, while in *Rinaldo*, the aria "Sibillar gli angui d'Aletto" is scored for two trumpets, timpani, and *tutti* orchestra, and the aria "Or la tromba in suon festante" and the two battle sinfonias are scored for four trumpets, timpani, and *tutti* orchestra.

There are several ways in which Handel could vary the tone color of the basic orchestra of strings, oboes, and bassoons without employing additional instruments. Following contemporary practice, Handel applied the principles of the Baroque concerto to the da capo aria. The most common and most simple application of these principles in Handel's operas is the division of the orchestra into *concertino* and *ripieno* groups, each with its own harpsichord. When Handel employs oboes and bassoons to double the strings, they are often omitted during the vocal sections (see Example 14). Indications for these concerto-like contrasts are more frequent in Handel's later operas. For example, these indications are found in fourteen of the nineteen arias in *Orlando* and *Alcina* scored for strings, oboes, and bassoons, and four of the fourteen arias in *Giulio Cesare* and *Rodelinda*, with the same orchestration. In the arias scored for string orchestra, similar *tutti/solo* contrasts also may have been used. The usual dynamic indications of *forte* during the ritornellos and *piano* during the vocal





Example 14. *Orlando*, "Se mi rivolgo al prato," meas. 1-4, 17-20, and 21-24.

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system, marked *Larghetto*, includes parts for Tutti, Viola, DORINDA, and Bassi. The Viola part is also labeled *Viol.(s. Ob.)*. Dynamics include *p* and *pp*. The second system, also marked *Tutti*, features a *sf.* dynamic. The third system continues the *Viol.(s. Ob.)* part with *pp* dynamics. The lyrics are: "Se mi ri.vol.go al pra.to, ve.der Me.do.ro mi.o in" and "Se mi.ro il ba.suo.l ri.o, mi pa.rche.mar.mo.ran.do or l'on.de o.ra le fronde di. ca.no si chia.mando qui'". Measure numbers 7 and 6 are indicated below the second system, and *(Fine.)* is at the end of the third system.

sections may also refer to the alternation between the full string orchestra (during the ritornellos) and a group of soloists, or a reduced orchestra (during the vocal sections). This alternation of *concertino* and *ripieno* groups not only introduced more variety in scoring and dynamics, but also had the practical advantage of avoiding conflict with the voice.





Sometimes the concerto principle is expanded by employing a solo instrument or instruments to concertize with the voice and the orchestra. Most of Handel's operas contain one obbligato aria. The majority of Handel's obbligato arias are scored for a solo instrument and orchestral accompaniment. Rarely does he follow the older practice of accompanying the obbligato instrument only by the continuo; the aria "Credete al mio dolore" from *Alcina* is one of the few examples. Unlike many of his contemporaries, the obbligato solo is not relegated to the ritornellos but interacts with the voice throughout the aria. During the vocal sections, however, the obbligato is subordinated to the vocal melody and is rarely treated as an equal to the voice as it is in the concerted arias of Bach.

Instruments from the basic orchestra are sometimes singled out for these solos. Examples include the solo violin in "Ama, sospira" from *Alcina*, and "Se in fiorito ameno prato" from *Giulio Cesare*; the solo cello in "Credete al mio dolore" from *Alcina*; and, two oboes and bassoons in "Lascia Amor, e siegui Marte" from *Orlando*. When brass instruments are introduced into Handel's arias, they are often treated as obbligato instruments rather than as orchestral instruments. For example, *Giulio Cesare*, *Alcina*, and *Ariodante* each contain one aria scored for obbligato horns. Similarly, when an unusual instrument is introduced into the orchestra, it is usually treated as an obbligato. Examples include the *viola da gamba* in "V'adoro, pupille" from *Giulio Cesare*, the two *cornetti* in "Par che mi nasca in seno" from *Tamerlano* and the two *violette marine* in "Gia l'ebro mio ciglio" from *Orlando*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> According to the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* 2nd ed. edited by Willi Apel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), the *violetta marina* is an alternative name for the *viola d'amore*—a stringed instrument similar to a treble viol but possessing sympathetic strings.



The basic orchestral sound could also be colored by altering the continuo accompaniment of cellos, basses, and harpsichord. But Handel's basically conservative approach to orchestration did not allow him to exploit the possibilities of this technique to its fullest extent. In his early operas, Handel sometimes dispensed with the entire continuo group, as in the arias "No, che quest'alma" and "Bel piacere" from *Rinaldo*. In his mature operas, however, Handel more often subtracted instruments from the basic continuo group. Sometimes he omitted the basses, as in the vocal sections of "Non disperar; chi sà?" from *Giulio Cesare*, or the harpsichord, as in the arioso "Figlia mia, non pianger, nò" from *Tamerlano*, or both basses and harpsichord, as in the B section of "Già lo stringo" from *Orlando*. These modifications of the continuo sometimes occur in duets where they are used to enhance the characterization. For example, in the duet "Prendi da questa mano" from *Ariodante*, the hero is accompanied by the usual continuo group, while Ginevra is accompanied by the cellos and harpsichord; in the duet "Finchè prendi ancor il sangue" from *Orlando*, Angelica is accompanied by the cellos and basses *Senza cembalo* while Orlando is accompanied by the full continuo group reinforced by the bassoons.

*Pizzicato* and mutes are employed by Handel for special effects, especially in nocturnal scenes or scenes of enchantment. In the lament "Scherza infida, in grembo al drudo" from *Ariodante*, Handel uses muted violins combined with *pizzicato* basses to depict the atmosphere of the royal garden at night. Another special effect is the use of a divided orchestra. The ballet and *coro* from the finale to *Ariodante* call for a stage orchestra of oboes and bassoons which is set in opposition with the orchestra of strings and trumpets in the pit.



In Cleopatra's aria "V'adoro pupille" from *Giulio Cesare*, Handel created perhaps his greatest feat of orchestration by applying several of these simple techniques to the basic *tutti* orchestra. The basic orchestra in this aria is divided into two parts: the first orchestra, in the pit, consisting of four-part strings, and the second orchestra on stage consisting of four-part *tutti* orchestra. Perhaps the nine muses who attend Cleopatra make up the stage orchestra, which would require nine players providing there was no doubling. The violins in both orchestras are muted, and the continuo group of the second orchestra is enlarged to include theorbo and harp. To the second basic orchestra, Handel added an obbligato *viola da gamba*, an instrument which was no longer used in Italian opera, but whose delicate "silvery" tones suited Handel's purposes perfectly. This delicate, and almost impressionistic orchestration is used by Handel to enhance Cleopatra's charms as she seduces Cesare through a vision of Parnassus.

Handel has often been credited with employing woodwind and brass instruments with greater frequency than his contemporaries. This predilection for wind instruments has been attributed to his German background with its strong tradition of the *Stadt-pfeiffer*. However, with the exception of his preference for doubling the strings by oboes and bassoons, Handel does not appear to have used wind instruments with greater frequency than his contemporaries. In fact some of his contemporaries employed wind instruments more often than Handel did; for example, Steffani makes greater use of oboes and bassoons, Hasse, greater use of the horns, and Vivaldi, greater use of arias with obbligato instruments. As in contemporary opera, the majority of Handel's arias are scored for string orchestra with or without doubling



oboes and bassoons. When Handel does employ woodwind or brass instruments, however, they are treated effectively, and often in a highly innovative manner which in some ways compensates for their infrequent use.

During his career as an opera composer, Handel was often criticized for his noisy accompaniments which interfered with the singers. Alexander Pope alludes to these criticisms in a footnote appended to his tribute to Handel in his poem *The Dunciad*, Book Four, 1742:

Mr. *Handel* had introduced a great number of Hands, and more variety of Instruments into the Orchestra, and employed even Drums and Cannon to make a fuller Chorus; which proved so much too manly for the fine Gentlemen of his age, that he was obliged to remove his Music into Ireland.<sup>45</sup>

Although this quote refers directly to Handel's expansion of the orchestra in the oratorios *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt*, these "fine gentlemen of his age" were probably irritated more by Handel's innovative treatment of the orchestra, rather than by the occasional orchestral tours de force. In Handel's arias, the orchestra plays a larger role in its interaction with the voice than in the arias of his contemporaries. The orchestral part is not relegated to the ritornellos; during the vocal sections, the orchestra often plays brief ritornellos or motivic fragments between the vocal phrases, as in the aria "Cor di padre, e cor d'amante" from *Tamerlano* (see Example 15), or superimposes accompanimental figures or independent counterpoints upon the voice, as in the aria "Se'l mio duol non è si forte" from *Rodelinda* (see Example 16). In most eighteenth-century operas, the concerted arias were usually

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<sup>45</sup>Alexander Pope, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 2nd ed. edited by William K. Wimsatt (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), p. 493.





Example 15. *Tamerlano*, "Cor di padre, e cor d'amante," meas. 8-11.

e cor d'a-man-te,      sal-da fe-de,      o-dio co-stan-te,      pur al

Example 16. *Rodelinda*, "Se'l mio duol non è si forte," meas. 4-11.

for-te,      chi tra figge,      oh Di-o!      chi svena      per pietà que-sto mio

cor?      chi trafigge      per pietà questo mio cor?      se il mio duol

con Bassons.      senza Bassons.

restricted to those arias scored for solo obbligato instruments. Although Handel wrote few arias with obligatory solo instruments, a large proportion of Handel's arias are of the concerted type because the voice concertizes with the independent lines of the orchestra.



## Other Forms in Handel's Operas

### Simple Recitative

While many aspects of Handel's operas are derived from the practices of earlier composers, such as Scarlatti and Steffani, Handel's treatment of simple recitative is basically progressive. Handel cultivated the dry rapid declamatory style of recitative that was used by his contemporaries. The triadic melodies, narrow range, syllabic setting, free rhythms, and static diatonic accompaniments of Handel's recitatives attest to this. The expressive melismas and arioso passages which are still found in the recitatives of Scarlatti and Steffani are only on rare occasions employed by Handel; one of the few examples of this obsolete practice occurs in the third act of *Orlando*, where Angelica interrupts Orlando's aria "Per far, mia diletta" with an unexpected arioso phrase on the words "Dei viver ancora."

Handel, like most of his contemporaries, preferred to keep his recitatives restrained, leaving the emotional expression for the arias and the accompanied recitatives. The simple recitatives of Handel abound in the harmonic and melodic clichés of the period, many of which have specific rhetorical functions. Examples include: the use of a rising second or third on a Phrygian cadence to depict a question (see Example 17); the use of a deceptive cadence or a dissonant leap in the bass to depict an unexpected turn of events or the entrance of a new character (see Example 18a and 18b); and, the use of authentic broken cadences as periods setting off large portions of the dialogue (see Example 19). Thus it is virtually impossible to distinguish Handel's simple recitative from that of his contemporaries, except that his



Example 17. *Tamerlano*, Act II, x.

ASTERIA.

Pa-dre, dim-mi: son più l'in-de-gna fi-glia?

Example 18a. *Rodelinda*, Act II, vi.

Grimoaldo. Rodelinda.

ples-si, il con-sor-te ab-braccio, son Ber-ta-ri-do. Berta-ri-do? E' men-da-ce.

Example 18b. *Orlando*, Act I, ix.

Esce il mago, facendo segno colla verga: sorge di sotterra una gran fontana che copre MEDORO, la scena cangiandosi in un delizioso giardino.

Orlando.

dor! con-vien che Or-lan-do al-lon-ta-ni di quà.) Chiedi-mi, oh bel-la, nuove

Example 19. *Giulio Cesare*, Act I, ix.

-ser-ra, il so-le in cie-lo o To-lo-me-o qui in ter-ra. MÀ sap-pi, cho-gni mal o-pi-a o-gni gran lu-me o-

operas contain less recitative because of the London audiences' dislike for this particular style of music.

The use of the dry *parlando* style of recitative does not always imply conventional and routine music, and often Handel's simple recitative can be dramatically very effective. For example, the last three scenes of *Alcina* are treated as a single recitative which builds to a climax as Ruggiero breaks the magic wand causing the destruction of the enchanted isle and leading to the *divertissement* finale. The short vocal entries, as each character comes onstage creates an exciting almost stretto effect in the dialogue. In Act I of *Giulio Cesare*, Handel



exploits rapid and unusual modulations in order to depict the grief and shock of the Romans as they are presented with the head of Pompeo.

Example 20. *Giulio Cesare*, Act I, iii.

Cesare. Sesto. Cornelia.

Giu-lio, che mi-ri? Oh Di-o! che veg-gio? Ahi las-sa! con-sor-te! mio te-so-ro!

Curio. Cornelia.

Grand'ar-dir! To-lo-me-o, bar-ba-ro tra-di-tor! io man-co, io mu-ro....

(Si ritorna) Cesare.

Cu-rio, su porgi O-là, si porgi

### Accompanied Recitative

Both contemporary and modern critics have praised Handel's skillful and dramatic treatment of the accompanied recitative. Handel followed Metastasio's principle that the accompanied recitative should be used with restraint in order that it retain its effectiveness. In the operas of Handel, the accompanied recitative is reserved for moments of emotional climax, when a character, confronted with a tragic or melancholic situation, gives expression to his or her emotions. Although these dramatic climaxes usually occur in monologues or soliloquies, an impassioned speech, such as a plea, pronouncement, or incantation will sometimes be set as accompanied recitative. For example, Bajazet's accompanied recitative "Asteria (che per figlia non ti ravvisi più)" is a plea addressed to his daughter; Orlando's "Vinse incanti, battaglie" is a pronouncement directed to all of the characters in the opera; and, Zoroastro's "O voi, del mio poter ministri eletti" is an incantation spoken to the genii. In contrast to the arias, the orchestration in the accompanied recitatives is invariably restricted to four-part strings.







The use of the accompanied recitative in Handel's operas varies greatly. *Orlando* contains eight accompanied recitatives and a grand *scena*, and *Tamerlano* contains five accompanied recitatives and a grand *scena*, while *Ariodante* and *Alcina* contain a single accompanied recitative each. On the average, Handel seems to have used the accompanied recitative with greater frequency than did his contemporaries, although he was not the only composer interested in the dramatic possibilities of the form. For example, Porpora made extensive use of the accompanied recitative in his London operas. While Handel may employ the accompanied recitative with greater frequency than many later composers did, he did not expand the form. During the middle eighteenth century, when composers such as Hasse were increasing the size of the accompanied recitative, Handel's recitatives remained approximately the same length throughout his career. The accompanied recitatives in his oratorios from the 1740's are no more extended than those in his operas from the 1720's.

Rarely are Handel's accompanied recitatives merely simple recitatives in which the orchestra provides the continuo accompaniment, as is sometimes the case in Vivaldi. (The accompanied recitatives in Vivaldi's *Tito Manlio*, *L'Olimpiade*, and *Juditha Triumphans* are of this type.) Usually the orchestra is given an active role in providing descriptive figuration between and sometimes upon the vocal phrases. Even when Handel uses only a sustained string accompaniment, the dissonant harmonies and bold modulations of his accompanied recitatives set them apart from the restrained simple recitatives. One of Handel's most celebrated accompanied recitatives, Cesare's "Alma del gran Pompeo" does not employ an active orchestral part, but relies solely upon



dissonant harmonies and bold modulations, including an unusual enharmonic modulation from G-sharp to A-flat minor, in order to depict the Shakespearean melancholy of the hero.

Example 21. *Giulio Cesare*, "Alma del gran Pompeo," meas. 14-18.

While some accompanied recitatives are contemplative and are based on a single affection ("Alma del gran Pompeo" is an excellent example), most accompanied recitatives depict an internal emotional conflict in which a character is torn between several emotions. In these recitatives, Handel often juxtaposes the various styles of accompanied recitative, with passive and active accompaniments, in order to depict the sudden emotional changes of his characters. For example, in the recitative "Fatto inferno è il mio petto," Grimoaldo's guilt-ridden feelings are depicted in an orchestral ritornello with its rapid unison arpeggios outlining chords of the diminished seventh, its measured *conciato* trills, and its large angular leaps. The material of the ritornello returns during the first section of the recitative interpolated between the vocal phrases (see Example 22). In the next section, the orchestra accompanies the voice in undulating parallel thirds in dotted rhythms, *piano*, which depict the breezes in the royal garden and their soothing effect upon Grimoaldo (see Example 23). In both the first and second sections, unity is created by the presence



Example 22. *Rodelinda*, "Fatto inferno è il mio petto," meas. 6-13.

Fat.to in-fer-no è il mio pet.to; di più fla-gelli ar-ma-te hò dentro il

Example 23. *Rodelinda*, "Fatto inferno è il mio petto," meas. 31-34.

Mà pur voi lu-sin-ga-te le stan-che mie pu-pil-le

Tutti.

of common motives or musical figures which recur in the accompaniment—a common feature in Handel's accompanied recitatives. Finally in the last section, sustained diatonic chords envelop Grimoaldo's speech, depicting his drowsiness and his desire for escape through sleep.





Alcina's accompanied recitative "Ah! Ruggiero crudel" is also divided into several sections. In the first, Alcina's bitter lament over Ruggiero's betrayal is accompanied by sustained dissonant chords of the orchestra; each vocal phrase is introduced by the same rhythmic figure. In the second section, Alcina asks the furies to assist her in preventing Ruggiero from leaving the enchanted isle. The orchestra here plays unison flourishes depicting the furies, and accompanies the *concitato* vocal part with punctuated chords. In the third section, Alcina realizes she has lost her magic powers, and since the furies do not answer her, the orchestral accompaniment is silenced. Only the *concertino* violins are employed to double the strange angular intervals of Alcina's desperate cries, perhaps to assist the singer's intonation.<sup>46</sup>

Example 24. *Alcina*, "Ah! Ruggiero crudel," meas. 27-31.

Viol. I. e Viol. II. concertino).

(sdegnata.)  
rührend.

-dan-za? eh! non m'a-di-te?  
Zög-rung? wie, ihr Ge-horcht nicht?  
Vi cer-co, e via-scon-de-te?  
ricoman-do, ich gebiet' euch,

This recitative illustrates Handel's bold treatment of modulation in the accompanied recitative. The first section begins and ends in B minor, but includes modulations to D minor and C-sharp minor, each key area being introduced by its Neapolitan sixth, while the second section begins in G major and modulates to F major through C minor.

<sup>46</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 47.





In order to emphasize Alcina's sudden realization of her loss of power over the furies, Handel juxtaposes the tonalities of F major and F-sharp major separated by a D major pivot chord.

Example 25. *Alcina*, "Ah! Ruggiero crudel," meas. 23-26.

The musical score for Example 25 consists of five staves. The top two staves are for the vocal line, and the bottom three staves are for the instrumental accompaniment. The key signature changes from F major to F-sharp major. The lyrics are in Italian and German. A performance instruction in Italian and German is written above the vocal line in the third measure.

(guarda d'intorno, e sospeso.)  
 blickt bestürzt umher.

fugga da me in-gra-to. Ma; ohi-mè! mi-se-ra! e qua-le in-so-li-ta tar-  
 -räterisch mich ver-las-se. Doch, o Leid! We-he mir! was soll das? welch un-ge-wohn-te

After a section of uncertain tonality (see example 24), the recitative cadences in B minor with a Picardy third.

The accompanied recitative often leads to a da capo aria for the same character. For example, Grimoaldo's "Fatto inferno è il mio petto" is followed by his aria "Pastorello d'un povero armento," and Alcina's "Ah! Ruggiero crudel" is followed by her aria "Ombre pallide." Because of the greater degree of tension created in the accompanied recitative, the following aria is likely to be rather expansive. These accompanied recitative/da capo combinations create large-scale musical scenes which are used by Handel as points of climax within an act.

Handel was one of the first composers to provide his accompanied recitatives with descriptive introductory ritornellos. During the 1730's, Rinaldo da Capua claimed that he was the first to employ ritornellos to "express or imitate what it would be ridiculous for the voice to attempt."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London: T. Becket, 1771), pp. 285-86.



However, Handel had employed this type of ritornello during the 1720's in the recitatives "Pompe vane di morte!" and "Fatto inferno è il mio petto" from *Rodelinda*, and "Alma del gran Pompeo," "Dall' ondosio periglio," and "Voi, che mie fide ancelle" from *Giulio Cesare*. In each recitative, the opening ritornello is used to depict the emotional state of the character and sometimes to suggest the scenic background. For example, in "Alma del gran Pompeo," the opening ritornello depicts both the melancholy of the hero and the ghost of Pompeo; the motive of the ritornello is similar to the motive from the second section of Sesto's double affection aria "Svegliatevi nel core" in which he sees a vision of his father's ghost.

#### Orchestral and Ensemble Music

Unlike his Italian contemporaries, Handel attached great importance to the orchestral music in his operas. This emphasis shows the influence of French music, which Handel experienced second-hand through the music of Reinhard Keiser while he was employed as a violinist and harpsichordist at the Hamburg Opera. In his German operas, Keiser incorporated the Italian aria and recitative, the German *Lied*, and French orchestral music in a highly eclectic manner. Like Keiser, Handel began all of his operas and most of his oratorios with French *overtures* rather than with the more modern Italian *sinfonia*. The French *overture*, with its slow ceremonial introduction and its fugal *Allegro*, was a congenial form to Handel's musical style. Although the overture's traditional function was to quiet the audience before the opera, the consistent high quality of the music and the serious tone of these overtures indicates that Handel considered them worthy of



more attention; some of Handel's finest orchestral music can be found in the French overtures to his operas and oratorios. The overtures are usually followed by one or sometimes two binary dances. The light character of these dances contrasts well with the severity of the overtures. Sometimes Handel links the overture to the opera by incorporating the dance movement into the dramatic action; for example, in *Giulio Cesare*, the minuet of the overture is transformed into the opening chorus of the opera, while in *Ariodante* the gavotte of the overture returns in the ballet finale to Act III.<sup>48</sup>

The sinfonias in Handel's operas, like the overtures, seem to be derived from French rather than Italian opera. In contemporary Italian opera, independent orchestral music is usually relegated to one or two brief, nondescriptive sinfonias. In Handel's operas, especially his late operas, descriptive sinfonias are frequently employed to depict or accompany action on stage or to enhance a stage setting. Although these pieces are never extended, they are often treated in a highly innovative manner and contribute much to the drama. For example, the sinfonias depicting the descent of Parnassus in Act II of *Giulio Cesare*, the prison scene in Act I of *Tamerlano*, the rising of the moon in Act II of *Ariodante*, and the flight of the genii in Act III of *Orlando* are among Handel's most inspired and romantic creations, comparable to Rameau's finest *symphonies*. For example, the sinfonia which introduces Act I of *Tamerlano* not only depicts the prison scene, but also the despairing emotional state of the prisoner Bajazet. The

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<sup>48</sup>Charles Cudworth, "Handel and the French Style," *Music and Letters* 40 (1959):122-31.



austerity of the sinfonia is intensified by Handel's dramatic treatment of silence:

Example 26. *Tamerlano*, Sinfonia to Act I, first section.

*Largo, e staccato.*

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Bassi.

Several of Handel's operas contain ballet *divertissements*. Contrary to the usual practice in Italian opera, Handel provided his own music rather than farming it out to one of the orchestral players. Ballet *divertissements* assumed a rare degree of importance during the 1735 season when Handel had at his disposal the ballet troupe of Marie Sallé. Handel took advantage of this opportunity and composed substantial ballet sequences in the operas *Ariodante* and *Alcina* and in the revivals of *Atalante* and *Il Pastor Fido*. In *Ariodante*, the ballet *divertissements* are placed at the end of each act, while in *Alcina* they are placed at the beginning of Act I and at the end of Act III. The *divertissements* occur at appropriately festive points in the drama, representing the engagement and later the wedding celebrations for







Ginevra and Ariodante, and the pleasures of Alcina's court. In Act II of *Ariodante*, the ballet *divertissement* is integrated into the drama by being used to depict Ginevra's tormented state of mind. After her lament, "Il mio crudel martoro," she falls into an exhausted sleep in which she is haunted by good and bad dreams. Upon awakening, Ginevra expresses her fears in a brief accompanied recitative which brings the act to an unexpected close. The idea for this scene was taken from "Le Sommeil" from Lully's *Atys* (1677) and was probably suggested to Handel by Marie Sallé.<sup>49</sup> Handel was so fond of the music that he later incorporated it into his next opera *Alcina* where it follows the aria "Ombre pallide" at the end of Act II. The similarity of the two dramatic situations makes the ballet music suitable for both operas, but the differences in character between Alcina and Ginevra make the ballet music psychologically more appropriate in its original context.<sup>50</sup> Chrysander, when editing the complete works of Handel, mistakenly omitted the ballet from *Ariodante* and published it as an alternate ending to Act II of *Alcina* even though the ballet begins with the final ritornello of Ginevra's lament.<sup>51</sup> Most of Handel's ballet music is French in style, and would not be out of place in the French operas of Lully, Campra, and Rameau.

Choral music in most of Handel's operas is relegated to the final *coro*, and the occasional choral interjection during the opera. Until 1735, Handel's operas did not require a chorus. Any choral passages

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<sup>49</sup>Dean, "Ariodante: Unity of Music, Drama, Ballet and Spectacle."

<sup>50</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 143.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.



were sung by the combined members of the cast whose names were usually written beside their parts. Only Handel's late operas, beginning with those written for Covent Garden, require a small chorus; in these operas, the choral parts are designated by vocal ranges rather than by the names of the singers. In addition, the choral music is given a slightly higher profile in these operas. For example, *Ariodante* and *Alcina* contain three and four choruses respectively, while *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, and *Orlando* each contain only a single *coro*. However, there is nothing in these operas to suggest that they were written at the same time as the oratorios *Athalia*, *Alexander's Feast*, *Saul*, and *Israel in Egypt*. Burney explains why Handel did not adopt his celebrated choral style in his operas:

in the church style . . . the performers having the Music before them, are not obliged to get it by heart, whereas an opera chorus, being in action, and committed to memory, must necessarily be short, easy and dramatic.<sup>52</sup>

Although the choruses in Handel's operas are short and simple, they can be treated in a dramatic manner. In *Giulio Cesare*, the *coro* is introduced during the minuet of the overture, representing a crowd of Egyptians hailing the entrance of Cesare, while in Act II, a chorus of conspirators interjects with cries of, "Morà, morà Cesare morà!" during the final *ritornello* to Cesare's aria "Al lampodell' armi." In *Tamerlano* and *Alcina*, Handel's skillful treatment of the *coro* greatly modifies the conventional *lieto fine*. In *Tamerlano*, the *lieto fine* follows upon the death of Bajazet. Although the text of the *coro* finale "D'atra notte già mirasi a scorno d'un bel giorno" is similar

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<sup>52</sup>Burney, *A General History of Music*, p. 687.



to that of the joyous *coro* in *Rodelinda*, Handel ignored the basic affection and composed an E minor saraband which serves as a choral lament for the death of the hero. The lamenting quality of this *coro* is emphasized by the dark scoring for three altos and a bass and by the absence of brass instruments.<sup>53</sup> A similar situation occurs in the finale to *Alcina*; the *coro* which follows the death of Alcina and the destruction of the enchanted isle represents the rejoicing of Alcina's liberated subjects. This *coro* is also a saraband, in G minor, and, as in *Tamerlano*, serves as a lament for the death of the heroine. This *coro* was intended as a dirge, as is proven by the fact that the music is derived from Apollo's lament over Daphne's metamorphosis in Handel's Italian cantata *Apollo e Daphne*.

Handel's treatment of the ensemble does not differ greatly from that of his contemporaries. Handel's operas usually contain one or two duets, usually for the *prima donna* and *primo uomo* and sometimes the *seconda donna* and the *secondo uomo*. There are two types of duets, those expressing the happiness of mutual affection, and those expressing the sorrow of forced separation. For example, the duets "Prendi da questa mano" and "Bramo haver mille cori" from *Ariodante*, "Caro! più amabile beltà" from *Giulio Cesare*, and "Vedrò ch'un dì si cangerà" from *Tamerlano* are examples of the former, and "Son nato a sospirar" from *Giulio Cesare*, "Vivo in te" from *Tamerlano*, and "Io t'abbraccio, e più che morté espro" from *Rodelinda* are examples of the latter. The affection is usually mutual because the two characters are given almost

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<sup>53</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 150.



identical texts. These duets are actually da capo arias for two soloists rather than true dramatic ensembles. The two voices share the same material, and usually sing in alternation or together in parallel thirds and sixths. Counterpoint is usually restricted to imitative vocal entries.

Only when there are two contrasting texts, rather than two parallel texts, does Handel make any attempt at characterizing the vocal parts. This type of melodic characterization is more frequently found in the trios and quartets which tend to have contrasting texts. For example, in the trios in *Orlando*, *Tamerlano*, and *Alcina*, two characters with parallel texts are set in opposition to another character with a different text. Handel delineated these two opposing groups by providing one of the characters with contrasting melodic lines. For example, in the trio "Non è amor, nè gelosia" from *Alcina*, Bradamante and Ruggiero, who are about to leave the enchanted isle, are confronted by Alcina who tries to convince them to stay. Although the voices sometimes share the same material in long points of imitation, during the dialogue sections, Alcina's vocal lines are characterized by their upward motion and their coloratura flourishes as opposed to the downward motion and syllabic setting of Ruggiero's and Bradamante's vocal lines.

Example 27. *Alcina*, "Non è amor, nè gelosia," meas. 25-28.

no!  
ther!

rio ti ran -  
o ferrà

in-degna, in-degna, in-degna,  
Unwürde! nein, nicht er-warte un-sre Gunst, Unwürde, Un-würde,

i-ni-qua, i-ni-qua!  
Un-selge, nein, nicht er-warte un-sre Gunst. Un-sel'ge,





### Formal Manipulation in the Arias of Handel

Handel often manipulates the forms of *opera seria* in order to enhance the drama and create musical variety. Because of the high degree of standardization, especially during the time of Handel's main operatic activity, any deviations from the norm, even of the most subtle kind, were readily noticeable and could be used for dramatic purposes.<sup>54</sup> Handel was certainly not the only composer to exploit the convention in this manner, because most of the formal irregularities in Handel's operas can also be found in the operas of his contemporaries. In addition, the composers can rarely take full credit for these experiments because they were usually determined or suggested by the libretti. Like most composers of the period, Handel was usually content to fulfill the prescriptions of his librettists. Perhaps one of the reasons why he chose older libretti is that they allowed more opportunities for irregularities than did the dramatically superior but formally more rigid libretti of Zeno and Metastasio.<sup>55</sup> Because many of these formal irregularities are determined or suggested by the libretti, they are more prominent in some operas than in others, although they can be found in all of Handel's operas. Regardless of whether or not these modifications in form can be attributed to the librettists, or can be considered as standard formulae common to most composers of the period, Handel's skillful and varied treatment of them

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<sup>54</sup>This is the basic premise of Winton Dean's book *Handel and the Opera Seria*, see chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>55</sup>Michael Talbot, "Vivaldi's *Tito Manlio*," an article accompanying the recording of *Tito Manlio* (Philips 6769 004).



attests to his talents as a dramatic composer and to his inherently dramatic approach to *opera seria*.

### Irregular Ritornello Structure

One of the most basic irregularities in the da capo aria form is the alteration of the standard ritornello plan of the aria. In certain situations, Handel omits or postpones the opening ritornello in order to convey a sense of urgency or spontaneity. The ritornello occurs either after the soloist's opening phrase, or is withheld until the end of the A section.<sup>56</sup> Occasionally this alteration is suggested by an aria text whose opening phrase serves as a continuation of the preceding recitative, as is the case in the arias from Scarlatti's *Marco Attilio Regolo*. For example, in the aria "Lo farò; dirò: spietato" from Act I of *Rodelinda*, the opening phrase is Eduige's answer to Garibaldo's question "E Pensi di poter lo? e lo farai?". However, this alteration is not dependent upon the aria text but rather upon the dramatic situation, and can occur in a great variety of different situations in order to emphasize a character's grief (as in "Priva son d'ogni conforto" and "Piangerò la sorte mia" from *Giulio Cesare*), anger (as in "Barbara; io ben lo sò" from *Alcina*), desire (as in "Unisca amor in noi" from *Orlando*), or haste (as in "Non è più tempo" from *Tamerlano*). In *Ariodante*, Handel uses this modification of the da capo form as one of the means to characterize his heroine. The opening ritornello is omitted or postponed in two of Ginevra's five da capo arias, one of her two duets (the one in which she is first

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<sup>56</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 158.



to sing), and both of her ariettas. This irregular feature—peculiar to Ginevra's arias—contributes to her musical characterization by emphasizing the spontaneity and sincerity of her emotions.

### Double Affection Arias

Most of Handel's operas contain one or two arias in which the second section is set in complete contrast to the first. Handel employs this type of aria only when the aria's second strophe seems to establish a second affection. Contrast is achieved by introducing new material and by changing the tempo, metre, and orchestration. In Handel's operas, this type of double affection aria is usually reserved for tragic situations in which a character is torn by two conflicting emotions. Because the dominant emotion is placed in the first section, and the subordinate emotion in the second section, the return of the dominant emotion in the da capo repeat is natural and even logical. The double affection aria is usually based on the contrasting affections of sorrow and vengeance. Within these arias one can clearly observe the techniques of the *Affektenlehre* employed by Handel in the depiction of two of the most common affections found in *opera seria*.

Cleopatra's aria "Piangerò, la sorte mia" from *Giulio Cesare* is a classic example of the double affection aria. In the first part of the aria, Cleopatra bewails her imprisonment and impending execution, while in the second part she swears that after her death, her ghost will haunt Tolomeo. The first section is a slow lament in E major, 3/8 metre, scored for transverse flute, first and second violins, and continuo, while the second section is a *furioso Allegro* in 4/4 metre, scored for obbligato cello, unison violins, and continuo (see Examples 28 and 29).



Example 28. *Giulio Cesare*, "Piangerò, la sorte mia," meas. 7-8.

Traversa,  
e Violino I

Violino II.

CLEOPATRA.

Bassi.

*Piange-rò, pian-ge-rò la sor-te mi-a, sì cru-*

Example 29. *Giulio Cesare*, "Piangerò, la sorte mia," meas. 48-51.

*Allegro.*

Viol. I. II.

Violoncello.

*Ma poi mor-ta d'ogn' in-tor-no il ti-ran-no e nol-te e gior-no*

The continuous downward motion of the vocal phrases, and the strategically placed coloratura passages on the word "agiterò" of the B section contrast sharply with the expressive upward leaps and the syllabic setting of the A section. The lamenting quality of the first section is also enhanced by the use of a ground bass, a technique which is extremely rare in Handel's operas (see Example 28). This ostinato is treated with a high degree of flexibility with regards to melody and rhythm, and in two passages, it is replaced by a free bass line.

Although this juxtaposition of sorrow and vengeance is a standard formula in the double affection arias, the manner in which these two affections are depicted is highly varied, giving each aria an individual character. In Alcina's "Ah! mio cor," the sorceress expresses her grief upon hearing the news of Ruggiero's departure in the first section,





while in the second section, she threatens to prevent his escape through the use of her supernatural powers. In order to depict the contrasting affections, Handel juxtaposes an *Andante larghetto* lament in C minor, 3/4 metre, with an *Allegro* vengeance arietta in E-flat major, 4/4 metre. In the first section, the four-part string orchestra provides the short descending "sighing" phrases of the vocal melody with an independent chordal accompaniment (Example 30). In the second section, the upper strings are reduced to unison violins which superimpose *concitato* figuration upon the agitated vocal melody (Example 31). Contrast between the two sections is also emphasized by altering the aria's tonal structure. The standard modulations to the relative major and the dominant minor are reversed: the first vocal paragraph cadences on the dominant minor, while the B section cadences on the relative major, giving the A section complete minor-mode coloring and the B section complete major-mode coloring. The poignancy of this aria is enhanced by the interesting manipulation of the aria's ritornello structure. The opening ritornello, which returns as the accompaniment to the vocal melody is non-thematic and almost "impressionistic" in its overall effect. However, in the final ritornello to the first section (see Example 32),

the upper strings, hitherto almost confined to the mournful detached chords . . . break into a passionate yearning theme in a major key, unrelated to anything heard before, that seems to reveal emotions too deep for words, in much the same way as the coda of Pamina's G minor aria in *The Magic Flute*.<sup>57</sup>

In the da capo, the opening ritornello is omitted and the return to the melancholy of the lament is initiated, appropriately enough, by the

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<sup>57</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 46.



Example 30. *Alcina*, "Ah! mio cor," meas. 16-32.

Ah! mio cor! scher - ni - to se - ! Stel - le!  
 Ah, mein Herz! verschmäht denn bist du! Ster - ne!

De - i! Nu - me d'a - mo - re! tra - di - to - re! t'a - mo tan - to; puoi lasciar - mi so - la in  
 Himmel! du Gott der Lie - be! ha, Fer - rä - ther! so dich lieb'ich, und du lässtest mich ein - sanu

Example 31. *Alcina*, "Ah! mio cor," meas. 124-133.

son re - i - na, e tem po an co - ra re - sti, o mo - ra,  
 ich bin Für - stin, will er ent - wei - chen, soll er ster - ben,

pe - ni sem - pre, o tor - ni a me, pe - ni sem - pre, o tor - ni a me. Ah! mio cor!  
 soll ver - der - ben, eh' er flieht, soll verder - ben, noch eh' er flieht. Ach, mein Herz!



Example 32. *Alcina*, "Ah! mio cor," meas. 92-101.



voice. The momentum of the B section, in effect, collapses upon the vocal entry of the da capo (Example 31). Through the subtle manipulation of da capo form, this aria

expresses with incomparable vividness the conflict between grief, love, injured pride, and vengeful fury that is tearing her apart, and the indecisive result is reflected in the da capo form.<sup>58</sup>

This pattern of sorrow/vengeance can be reversed, as it is in Ariodante's aria "Tu preparati a morire," which depicts the hero's inner conflict when he hears Polinesso's slanderous story of Ginevra's infidelity. The first section is a heroic coloratura aria in E major, *Allegro*, 4/4 metre, in which Ariodante swears vengeance upon Polinesso for his slanderous tale. The second section is a tragic arioso lament in E minor, *Larghetto*, 3/4 metre, in which Ariodante vows that if Polinesso speaks the truth, he will die of despair. Instead of changing the orchestration in the B section, Handel changes the key, employing the tonic minor rather than the usual submediant and mediant modulations. The structural proportions of this aria are unusual; the B section, traditionally the shorter section of the aria, is longer

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<sup>58</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 45.



than the A section—thirty-seven measures of *Larghetto* as opposed to thirty-three measures of *Allegro*. Perhaps Handel gave the B section greater importance to convey the idea that Ariodante is truly fearful and doubts Ginevra's fidelity.

One of the most unusual examples of the double affection aria is "Già lo stringo, già l'abbraccio" from Act III of *Orlando*. In this aria, Orlando, at the height of his madness, mistakes Dorinda for Angelica's brother Argalia, whom he challenges to mortal combat. In the first section, Orlando boasts he will crush his opponent with his bare hands, and if that is not enough, he will then challenge Mars. The A section is a heroic aria *all'unisono* in B-flat major, and is designated *A tempo di Gavotta*, the same dance metre that Handel ironically employed in Orlando's mad scene in Act II (for the following analysis see Example 33 which reproduces the entire aria). The first vocal paragraph of the A section cadences in the submediant rather than in the expected dominant. In the second section, Orlando imagines himself dead, killed by the torments of love; this emotional self-indulgence is depicted in an unusual *Largo* arioso accompanied by four-part strings, without basses and harpsichord. Instead of the usual submediant and mediant modulations, the arioso begins in the dominant minor and modulates to the supertonic through the distant key of A-flat minor. There is a similarity between this piece and the arioso section "Ah! misero e schernito" in Orlando's mad scene, where he indulges in the same fantasy (see Example 54). As in Alcina's "Ah! mio cor," the ritornello structure of this aria is very unusual. Because the orchestra is completely dependent upon the voice, either doubling the voice in the A section or providing chordal support in





Example 33. *Orlando*, "Già lo stringo, già l'abbraccio."

*A tempo di Gavotta.*

Violini e Viola colla parte.

ORLANDO. *Già lo stringo, già l'abbraccio con la forza del mio braccio, nuovo Andre-o l'al-zo da terra, e se vinto non si*

Bassi. *ren-de, perchè Mar-te lo di-fen-de, Mar-te an-cor io sfi-do a guer-ra, e se vin-to non si ren-de, perchè*

*Mar-te lo di-fen-de, Mar-te an-cor io sfi-do a guer-ra, Mar-te an-cor io sfi-do a guer-ra.*

*Largo.*

Viol. I.

Viol. II.

Viola.

*Son mor-to, o ca-ro be-ne, traf-fi-to da rie-pe-ne lan-gue-te ca-do a ter-ra, ca-do a*

Violone, senza Bassi e senza Cembali.

*A tempo.*

*ter-ra, lan-gue-te a ter-ra. Già lo*

Tutti Bassi.

*Dal Segno.*

**[2. Ritornello.]**

Viol. e Oboe I. II.

*ra. (spurio)*

*ter-ra, lan-gue-te a ter-ra. Già lo*



the B section, only at the final cadence of the da capo does the orchestra provide a concluding ritornello. This ritornello is not based on the material of the aria, but on new material which is reminiscent of the coda to Orlando's mad scene. Thus Handel creates a series of subtle relationships between Orlando's mad scene in Act II and his subsequent aria in Act III. The effect of madness is also emphasized by the irregular tonal and ritornello structure, the unusual orchestration, and the juxtaposition of two contrasting affections. The double affection aria has been considered in some detail because, in addition to creating affective contrast between the two sections of the da capo aria, Handel usually employs other formal irregularities which give these arias a highly individual profile.

### Interrupted Arias

Many of Handel's operas contain one or two arias which are interrupted by the dramatic action. Unlike the interrupted arias in Act II of Scarlatti's *Marco Attilio Regolo*, Handel and/or his librettists only employed this formal irregularity at certain climactic points in the drama. Sometimes the interruption is only temporary, as in Bertarido's aria "Con rauco mormorio" from *Rodelinda*, where the aria is interrupted by a short recitative aside by Eduige, inserted between the B section and the *dal segno* repeat. This temporary interruption alters the usual key structure of the B section which cadences in the supertonic rather than in the expected mediant. Most often the interruption changes the dramatic situation, and the aria is not continued. In the love duet "Prendi da questa mano," Ariodante and Ginevra are interrupted at the beginning of the da capo repeat by the entrance of the



King, who

takes both their hands, and gives them his blessing in recitative, the action continuing without a break. . . . Everything builds up to the King's interruption, which coming just as we reach the expected da capo achieves the maximum surprise; and it conveys movingly and economically the dramatic point that he favors the union of the lovers.<sup>59</sup>

The interruption, which is indicated in the original libretto, occurs in the middle of a word and on a dissonant supertonic four-two chord.<sup>60</sup>

Example 34. *Ariodante*, "Prendi da questa mano," meas. 80-83 and interruption.

SCENA VI.  
Mentre replicano il Duetto porgendosi la mano, il Rè  
entra nel mezzo, e prende la mano d'Ariodante e della figlia.  
ARIODANTE, GINEVRA, RÈ, ODOARDO e guardie.

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The duets "Ritornava al suo bel viso" and "Unisca amor in noi" from *Orlando* are interrupted by the interaction of the two characters involved. Both duets are rather irregular in that the characters sing in alternation rather than together: one character sings the A section, and the other sings the B section. "Ritornava al suo bel viso" begins as an aria for Angelica in which she expresses her love for Medoro. At the end of the A section, Medoro enters and takes up the melody in the relative minor, expressing his affection for Angelica.

<sup>59</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 106.





At this point, the libretto calls for a da capo repeat, but instead, the action continues in recitative without regaining the tonic, as Angelica tells Medoro of her desire for marriage.<sup>61</sup>

In the duet "Unisca amor in noi," Orlando attempts to seduce the shepherdess Dorinda. Dorinda is excited about the prospects of having the great Orlando as her lover, but, because of her lowly station, she does not believe his vows. The two distinct affections caused Handel to conceive this duet as a double affection aria for two singers. The duet begins as a saraband aria in D minor for Orlando accompanied only by the continuo. The omission of the opening ritornello emphasizes Orlando's urgent desire. Dorinda answers Orlando in an *Andante* section in 4/4 metre which serves as the B section to this duet. Her excitement is depicted by the haphazard arpeggios of the violins and by the rapid modulations. Orlando returns to his seduction in the da capo, but is continually interrupted by Dorinda's skeptical questions in simple recitative.

Example 35. *Orlando*, "Unisca amor in noi," meas. 21-28 and interruption.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system is for Orlando's aria, marked *Largo*. It features a treble and bass staff with a continuo line below. The lyrics are: "U - ni - sca a - mor in me - gli - o ri - flet - ti... io son Dorinda!". The second system is for Dorinda's interruption, marked *Andante*. It also features a treble and bass staff with a continuo line below. The lyrics are: "Ve - ne - re - hel - la! En - già lo - so, tu sei proni - po - te de' Dei, ah! nò, sei l'Ar - ga - li - a, fra -".

<sup>61</sup>Winton Dean, "Orlando: One of the Masterpieces of the 18th Century Theater," article accompanying the recording *Orlando* (R C A LSC-6197).





After three interruptions of the saraband, Orlando breaks into simple recitative as his madness returns. In his hallucinations, he mistakes Dorinda for Angelica's brother, Argalia, whom he challenges to a duel in the bizarre double affection aria "Già lo stringo."

Sometimes an aria can be interrupted by an arioso, an accompanied recitative, or a sinfonia. For example, Orlando's aria "Per far, mia diletta" is interrupted on the final vocal phrase of the A section prior to the closing ritornello by Angelica's arioso "Dei viver ancora" as she prevents Orlando from committing suicide.

Example 36. *Orlando*, "Per far, mia diletta," meas. 22-29 and interruption.

Musical score for Orlando's aria "Per far, mia diletta." The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "Or-lan-do, Or-lan-do si mo-ra, si mo-ra!"

### SCENA ULTIMA.

ANGELICA, ORLANDO, MEDORO, ZOROASTRO, e DORINDA.

Musical score for Angelica's arioso "Dei viver ancora." The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "Angelica. Dei vi-ver an-co-ra, dei vi-ver an-co-ra! Or-lan-do si mo-ra!"

*corre per uccidere u precipitarsi, quando rincontra Angelica, che lo trattiene.*

The regularity in which the "grim" unison ritornello returns throughout the A section makes the interruption even more unexpected. Because



this aria occurs at the turning point of the drama which announces the *lieto fine*, Handel aims for sudden contrasts by juxtaposing the disjunct, declamatory unison melody of Orlando's F-sharp minor aria with the simple lyricism of Angelica's A major arioso passage.

The grand *scene* in *Rodelinda* each consist of an expansive aria interrupted by an accompanied recitative. The dramatic situation in Rodelinda's *scena* "Ombre, piante, urne funeste!" is very similar to the grand *scena* in Scarlatti's *Marco Attilio Regolo*. Rodelinda comes to visit the tomb of her husband who supposedly has been killed in battle. Before her husband's tomb, she sings an expressive saraband lament in B minor scored for strings and transverse flute. Although the aria appears to be through-composed, it is actually a da capo aria in which the da capo repeat has been shortened by thirty measures and is written out in full. Handel manipulates the opening ritornello in order to create an atmosphere of mystery and suspense; after ten measures in which the strings and flute alternate in echo passages, the ritornello cadences in the tonic, but instead of the expected vocal entry, a solo violin enters for two measures; only after the second orchestral cadence does the voice finally enter (see Example 37). In the aria's concluding ritornello, the orchestra sustains the final chord, and the aria passes smoothly into an impassioned accompanied recitative as Rodelinda continues her lamentation. Her accompanied recitative is interrupted first by the asides of Bertarido and Unulfo, who are in hiding, and then by the entrance of Garibaldo.

The *scena* "Chi di voi fù più infedele" in Act III takes place in a prison where Bertarido awaits his execution. The hero expresses his despair in an unusual *Largo* aria in B-flat minor. The basic affection



Example 37. *Rodelinda*, "Ombre, piante, urne funeste!" meas. 1-20.

The musical score for Example 37, measures 1-20 of "Ombre, piante, urne funeste!" from *Rodelinda*, is presented in a standard musical notation format. The score is in 3/8 time, marked "Largo". It features staves for Traversa, Violino I. II., Viola, RODELINDA (voice), and Bassi. The vocal line is characterized by short, fragmented phrases and deceptive cadences. The orchestration includes woodwinds, strings, and a solo violin section. The score ends with the word "Om-bre,".

is emphasized by the short fragmented phrases of the angular melodic lines of both the voice and the orchestra (see Example 38). The frequent deceptive cadences, which are each time followed by a dissonant downward leap in the vocal part, may have been intended by the composer to represent the cruel fate that continually destroys Bertarido's happiness (see Example 38). Unlike *Rodelinda's scena*, this aria is completely through-composed, and the interruption is very startling, representing the dramatic climax of the opera. In the middle of a phrase, on a dissonant dominant four-two chord, Eduige drops a sword into the prison to aid her brother. Bertarido is suddenly wrenched out of the melancholy of his aria into the heroic action of the accompanied recitative as he finds the sword and prepares to defend himself (see Example 38).











many more examples of this in *Rodelinda*—illustrates the way in which a skillful composer could enforce an overall design upon the series of self-contained recitative/aria combinations which make up the musical structure of *opera seria*.

### Ariettas

The regular alternation of da capo aria and simple recitative is occasionally broken by the introduction of non-da capo arias. Most of Handel's operas contain at least one or two arias which are not in da capo form. The most common are the ariettas. The arietta is a short air set to a single rhyming strophe which is placed at the beginning, or sometimes in the middle of a scene, and is not followed by an exit. Usually the arietta is written in arioso style and can be regarded as an intermediate form between the aria and accompanied recitative, partaking of the lyricism of the former and the flexibility of the latter. The arioso style is usually employed in conjunction with slow or moderate tempos (*Largo*, *Larghetto*, or *Andante*) in lamenting or amorous scenes. Because of the pronounced arioso style, Handel's ariettas are usually designated as ariosos, as they are in Chrysander's *Complete Edition of Handel's Works*. While some ariettas are through-composed, many have some type of binary structure. In these binary ariettas, the aria strophe is usually given two or three text-settings which are often separated by intermediate ritornellos. The first vocal paragraph will cadence on the dominant in ariettas in the major mode and on the relative major in ariettas in the minor mode. In addition, the ariettas are usually introduced and concluded by orchestral ritornellos. The influence of the da capo aria upon the arietta is obvious,



and some ariettas could easily be mistaken for da capo arias without the B section and the da capo repeat. This is especially true of ariettas composed in aria style, such as "Presti omai l'Egizia terra" from *Giulio Cesare* and "Vezzi, lusinghe, e brio" from *Ariodante*. Like the aria, the arietta is usually accompanied by the orchestra which is generally restricted to the strings and continuo. Occasionally Handel follows the older practice of accompanying the arietta with only the continuo as in "Deh piangete" from *Giulio Cesare* and "Stimolato dalla gloria" from *Orlando*.

Handel seems to have been fond of the arietta. Many of the ariettas in Handel's operas cannot be traced back to their original libretti, and are "interpolations, made either by insertion, by the elevation of a few lines written for recitative, or by the omission of the second part of a da capo aria."<sup>62</sup> For example, the ariettas "Vezzi, lusinghe e brio" and "Numi! lasciarmi vivere" from Acts I and III of *Ariodante*, like the ariettas in *Siroe*, *Lotario*, *Atalanta*, and *Berenice*, are insertions made by Handel's librettists. Perhaps Handel had some influence upon the inclusion of these irregular forms into his libretti.

Handel probably favoured the arietta because it "did not require the exit of the singer; like a sinfonia it could be used to build up towards a climax later in the scene, and so loosen one of the more tiresome bonds of the convention."<sup>63</sup> Handel and his librettist employ the arietta in this manner in Act II of *Alcina*. The act begins with

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<sup>62</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 42.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.



the arietta "Col celarvi" in which Ruggiero languishes over the absence of Alcina. In the middle of a word, on a secondary dominant chord, the arietta is interrupted as Melisso enters and reprimands Ruggiero for his infidelity. Melisso gives him a magic ring allowing Ruggiero to see the palace of Alcina in its original state—a horrid desert. This typically Baroque scenic transformation is depicted in the arietta "Qual portento." Because the aria text is carved out of Ruggiero's recitative exclamations, Handel designated this piece as a *cavata* in the autograph score.<sup>64</sup> The opening ritornello, with its "stern" unisons, dotted rhythms, and large angular leaps, serves as a descriptive *sinfonia* depicting the desert scene. The vocal line, in effect, is superimposed upon this descriptive *sinfonia*.

Example 39. *Alcina*, "Qual portento," meas. 1-9.

Non così tosto Melisso porge a Ruggiero l'anello: stato già d'Angelica, che la sala tutta si cangia in luogo orrido, e deserto. Melisso in tanto riprende la sua prima forma.

*Largo.*

(Violini.)

RUGGIERO.

(Bassi.)

Qual por ten - to, qual por ten - to mi ri - chia - ma la mia  
Welch ein Wunder, Wun - der ruft zu rück mir mei - nen

A recitative dialogue leads to Melisso's da capo aria "Pensa a chi geme d'amor" wherein he continues to lecture Ruggiero. Upon his exit,

<sup>64</sup> Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 52.



Bradamante enters and in a recitative dialogue, a misunderstanding develops that causes her to lash out at Ruggiero in the *bravura* vengeance aria "Vorrei vendicarmi." After these strange and unexpected events, Ruggiero is finally allowed to express his confused emotions in the da capo aria "Mi lusinga il dolce affetto" which serves as the musical/dramatic climax to the first three scenes of Act II.

Because the arietta occurs at the beginning or in the middle of a scene, it is often interrupted by the entrance of another character, as is the case in Ruggiero's "Col celarvi." One of the most striking examples of the interrupted arietta can be found in Act III of *Ariodante*. In this scene, Ginevra awaits the outcome of the tournament that will decide whether she lives or dies. Without an introductory ritornello, she begins her lamenting arietta "Manca, oh Dei! la mia costanza," but after five measures, she is interrupted by a sinfonia for *tutti* orchestra and horns proclaiming the arrival of the royal party and her liberation (see Example 40). As in Orlando's "Per far, mia diletta," this interruption occurs at the dramatic turning point that announces the *lieto fine*, and thus Handel creates sudden contrast by juxtaposing the homophonic arioso style of Ginevra's G minor arietta with the imitative festive style of the F major sinfonia.

#### Non-Da Capo Arias and Ensembles

In rare instances, other aria forms are used to replace the da capo aria. "Verdi prati" from Act II of *Alcina* is a full-scale exit aria in rondeau form. The simplicity and the lack of a da capo caused Carestini to consider the aria unworthy of his great talents. Ginevra's aria "Sì, morrò; mà l'onor mio meco" from Act III of *Ariodante* is





Example 40. *Ariodante*, "Manca, oh Dei! la mia costanza," meas. 1-6 and interruption.

*Largo.*

(Violino I.)

(Violino II.)

(Viola.)

GINEVRA.

(Bassi.)

*Manca, oh Dei! la mia co-stan-za, mentre ha fi-ne il mio do-lor! nè mi re-sta la spe-*

## SCENA XII.

Al suono d'una allegra Sinfonia viene il Rì.  
ARIODANTE, DALINDA, LURCANIO, ed ODOARDO.

## SINFONIA.

*Corno I. II.*

Viol. e Oboe I.

Viol. e Oboe II.

- ran-za di mo - - rir...

unusual in that the first phrase of the text ("Sì, morirò; mà l'onor mio meco, oh! Dio! morir dovrà?") is set as a *Largo, e piano* prelude in 3/4 metre, while the second phrase ("Giusto Ciel, deh, pietà del reggio onor") is a concerto-like *Allegro* in 4/4 metre. The text is also unusual in that there is no rhyme scheme, which suggests that the aria text may have been carved out of the recitative as in "Qual portento" from *Alcina*. In the *Allegro* section, an obbligato violin and cello are added to the five-part orchestra of first, second, and third violins, violas, and basses.



In Orlando's slumber aria "Già l'ebro mio ciglio," Handel creates the expectation of a da capo aria, only to frustrate this expectation by writing a through-composed aria. Although the aria text, which consists of two strophes, implies a da capo form, Handel only hints at the form; the first strophe is set twice, with a cadence on the dominant at the end of the first setting and a return to the tonic at the end of the second one. The second strophe begins on the submediant and modulates to the mediant as expected, but then Orlando grows tired and is unable to finish the da capo. Instead, the second strophe is repeated, and with much difficulty the tonic is regained. Orlando falls asleep on a monotone, while the obbligato *violette marine* finish the aria, expanding the opening ritornello from four to nine measures.

Example 41. *Orlando*, "Già L'ebro mio ciglio," meas. 18-28.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 18-24, and the second system contains measures 25-28. The vocal line is in G major, 3/4 time. The lyrics are in Italian and English. The basso continuo line is in G major, 3/4 time. The obbligato *violette marine* is indicated by a note in the second system.

System 1 (Measures 18-24):

Vocal line: *lan-do o scher-zan-do non far-mi de-star! tu, per-fi-do.Amo-re, non far-mi de-star,*

System 2 (Measures 25-28):

Vocal line: *ro lan-do, scher-zan-do non far-mi de-star!*

Obbligato *violette marine* (si addormenta sopra un sasso.)

During the last section, Orlando becomes so fatigued that he is unable to complete his cadences, allowing the orchestra to complete them for him; the vocal phrases end with deceptive cadences which are repeated



by the orchestra as authentic cadences. The idea of physical exhaustion is also conveyed by the chromaticism which is unusual in Handel's major-mode arias (see Example 41). In 1743, Handel was to employ a similar formal design in Morpheus' aria from Act II of *Semele* in order to depict the god of sleep.

A minority of Handel's operas contain ensembles that are not in da capo form. These non-da capo ensembles usually occur in the middle of a scene where they are employed to depict some type of conflict between the characters on stage. In the duet "Finché prendi ancor il sangue" from Act III of *Orlando*, the hero in his madness threatens to kill Angelica, who in turn laments her cruel fate and the fate of her lover, Medoro. Because of the strong dramatic conflict, each character is given highly contrasting music. The music of Angelica's lament consists of long lyrical phrases set in syllabic style accompanied by *pianissimo* strings *senza cembalo*; the upper strings, which complement the vocal melody, are given long descending phrases enlivened by the frequent crossing of parts and many suspensions (see Example 42). The music of Orlando's threats consists of short declamatory phrases with occasional coloratura passages accompanied by *forte* strings, harpsichord, and bassoons; the upper strings, which complement the vocal melody, are given short disjunct figures in *détaché* style (see Example 42). These highly contrasting materials are unified by the continuous presence of a walking bass. Angelica and Orlando first present their conflicting emotions and music separately, then in close alternation, and finally together (see Example 43). Orlando is given the final phrase and at the end of the ritornello, he seizes Angelica and throws her into a cavern. The ritornellos of this duet are treated in an





Example 42. *Orlando*, "Finchè prendi ancor il sangue," meas. 1-19.

*Andante larghetto.*

Violino I. *pp*

Violino II. *pp*

Viola. *pp*

ANGELICA.

ORLANDO.

Bassi. *pp, senza Cembalo e senza Bassons.*

*Fin. ché pren -*

*- dian - cor il san - gue an - cor — il san - gue, go - di in - tan - to, go - di in - tan - to de' miei*

*lu - mi, de' miei lu - rai me - stou - mor!*

*Sol ha se - te di san - gue il mio cor, sol ha*

*con Cemb. e Bassons.*

*se - te di san - gue, sol ha se - te di san - gue il mio cor, sol ha se - te di san - gue il mio cor,*

*de -*





Example 43. *Orlando*, "Finchè prendi ancor il sangue," meas. 39-47.

The musical score consists of three systems of music. The first system shows a vocal line (soprano) and a basso continuo line (bass). The vocal line has lyrics: "sto pian - to è san.gue an.cor! -". The basso continuo line has lyrics: "pla-ca il mio giu.sto ri-gor, il mio giu.sto ri-gor, -". The second system shows a vocal line (soprano) and a basso continuo line (bass). The vocal line has lyrics: "pla-ca il mio giu.sto ri-gor, -". The basso continuo line has lyrics: "ma non pla-ca il mio giu.sto ri-gor, -". The third system shows a vocal line (soprano) and a basso continuo line (bass). The vocal line has lyrics: "pla-ca il mio giu.sto ri-gor! -". The basso continuo line has lyrics: "ma non pla-ca il mio giu.sto ri-gor, -".

con Cemb.  
e Bassons.

innovative manner: while the opening ritornello establishes the lamenting mood of Angelica's music, the final ritornello, derived from Orlando's coloratura passages, depicts the hero's grim resolution to punish Angelica (see Example 43). In an accompanied recitative, Orlando madly declares he has rid the world of all its monsters and is prepared to rest. The final section of the recitative, which is a magical



invocation of the cave of sleep, serves as a transition to Orlando's slumber aria "Già l'ebro mio ciglio." The entire scene is through-composed, with only eighteen of a total of 118 measures set as simple recitative. Not only does this duet illustrate Handel's dramatic manipulation of form, but also his dramatic manipulation of the Doctrine of the Affections; it is one of the few examples in *opera seria* where two contrasting affections are portrayed simultaneously.

One of the most interesting examples of Handel's use of the non-da capo aria and ensemble occurs in the finale of Act II of *Tamerlano*. Five of the six characters of the opera are brought on stage for the marriage of Asteria to Tamerlano, her father's enemy and captor. Asteria is forced to reveal her plan for killing Tamerlano at the altar, when her father threatens to commit suicide because of his daughter's disgraceful marriage. The revelation of Asteria's plans creates the dramatic climax which is realized in a through-composed trio wherein Tamerlano threatens both Bajazet and Asteria with execution—a sentence they both defiantly accept. After Tamerlano's exit, Asteria in turn asks Bajazet, Andronico, and Irene whether they think she is still a traitor. Each character answers her in a short arietta without an opening ritornello and then exits. These exit ariettas in rapid succession

clear the stage and focus attention on the character to whom they are addressed and whose mounting excitement finds vent in the final aria. This becomes the counterclimax toward which the whole scene has been moving.<sup>65</sup>

The musical structure of this scene, as is often the case in *opera seria*,

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<sup>65</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 146.



is determined by the original libretto which designates the arias of Bajazet, Andronico, and Irene as *cavatine*, and Asteria's aria as a da capo.<sup>66</sup>

### The Grand Scena

Many of Handel's operas contain a grand *scena* in which the various forms of *opera seria*—the aria, arietta, sinfonia, and accompanied recitative—are combined to achieve a musical/dramatic climax. Handel's treatment of the grand *scena* is perhaps the most radical aspect of his operas. The *scena* is reserved for lengthy monologues or soliloquies in which strong or violent emotions are expressed. "Dall' ondosso periglio" from Act II of *Giulio Cesare* is one of the simpler examples of the grand *scena* in that it consists of an elaboration upon an accompanied recitative and da capo aria. The *scena* begins with a sinfonia in F major depicting the sea breezes as Giulio Cesare wanders aimlessly along the coast after swimming the Bay of Alexandria. The following accompanied recitative continues the serene mood of the sinfonia, as Cesare thanks the gods for their protection. When he realizes that he is alone without his legions, the recitative becomes agitated through the dissonant leaps, dotted rhythms, and seventh and diminished chords of the orchestra. The recitative ends on the dominant, and without any ritornello, Cesare begins his aria unaccompanied on the word "Aure." The orchestra enters in the next measure with the music derived from the opening sinfonia which now serves as the accompaniment for the vocal melody (see Example 44). The return of the opening sinfonia as the accompaniment is dramatically justified because Cesare asks the

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<sup>66</sup>Knapp, "Handel's *Tamerlano*: The Creation of an Opera," p. 417.





Example 44. *Giulio Cesare*, "Dall' ondosio periglio/Aure, deh, per pietà," meas. 39-50.

The musical score is for measures 39-50 of *Giulio Cesare*. It is written for a voice and keyboard. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked *Adagio* for the first part and *Andante, e piano* for the second part. The lyrics are: "le er - me a - re - ne al mo - nar - ca del mondo er - rar con - vie - ne? Au - re, au - re, deh, per pie - tà spi - ra - teal pre - to".

sea breezes to have pity upon him and to tell him news of his love.

An alternative analysis of this *scena* would be to consider the accompanied recitative as an insertion between the aria's lengthy opening ritornello and the entrance of the voice. At the end of the B section, when Cesare realizes he is in the midst of a battlefield strewn with weapons and dead soldiers, the music passes into another agitated accompanied recitative. This accompanied recitative is followed by a written-out da capo of the A section, perhaps to indicate that it was to be sung unembellished. The structure of this *scena* is similar to the grand *scena* in Scarlatti's *Marco Attilio Regolo*, except that Handel's accompanied recitative is shorter and is preceded by a *sinfonia*.





Cleopatra's seduction aria "V'adoro, pupille" from Act II is similar in structure to Cesare's *scena*, except that the accompanied recitatives are replaced by simple recitatives. The *scena* begins with a sinfonia which could be considered as the opening ritornello to Cleopatra's F major aria. This is interrupted by a dialogue between Cesare and Nireno in simple recitative. Then there is a descriptive sinfonia in which the vision of Parnassus opens, revealing Cleopatra dressed as Virtue seated upon a throne. After a brief recitative passage by Cesare, the aria begins without a ritornello. At the end of the B section, Cesare comments upon the beauty of the aria, and then comes the da capo repeat. These two *scene*, like the two *scene* in *Rodelinda*, tend to balance each other because of the similarities in structure and key and their strategic position in the opera. Like the choruses in *Saul* and *Jephtha*, they seem to provide the main pillars around which the entire work is constructed.

The grand *scene* in Act III of *Tamerlano* and Act II of *Orlando* are much more complex in their structure and "reach the highest pinnacle of dramatic art."<sup>67</sup> In both operas, the *scena* provides the musical/dramatic climax, representing the suicide of Bajazet and the madness of Orlando respectively. The grand *scena* in *Tamerlano* consists of five accompanied recitatives, two ariettas, and two brief passages of simple recitative. These diverse sections are unified into an expansive formal structure of 110 measures. The *scena* begins when Bajazet comes on stage after taking the poison and addresses the other characters in a passage of simple recitative which is intensified

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<sup>67</sup> Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," p. 150.



by dissonant harmonies in the style of seventeenth-century recitative. When he sees Tamerlano, Bajazet defies him and his court, saying he has cheated his executioners by poisoning himself. The short fragmented phrases of his vocal line are interspersed with *concitato* passages for unison strings. The recitative then changes into arioso style as Bajazet bids farewell to his daughter. The orchestral figuration gives way to dissonant harmonies above a descending chromatic bass. An unusual enharmonic modulation—from F-sharp major through B-flat minor to E minor—is used to convey the intense emotion of this farewell (see Example 45).

In a passage of simple recitative, Asteria resolves to follow her father and take her own life. After a brief accompanied recitative, Bajazet comforts his daughter in a ternary *siciliano* arietta in F minor. In the middle section, which is the more extended of the two parts, Handel exploits chromaticism and bold modulations to depict Bajazet's realization of death. The tragic affect is restrained, however, by the lyrical flow of the *siciliano* melody and the hushed accompaniment of the four-part *pianissimo* strings *senza cembalo* (see Example 46). The written-out repeat of the first section serves more as a refrain than as a da capo. Bajazet then addresses Tamerlano, calling forth the furies of hell to torment him: he sings first in an accompanied recitative marked *furioso*, and then in an equally furious arietta in *Presto* 3/4 metre. This arietta contrasts strongly with the previous one, and consists of short declamatory vocal phrases, punctuated by rapid scale passages of the unison string orchestra, reminiscent of the introductory accompanied recitative (see Example 47). Without regaining the tonic, this arietta comes to an abrupt end as



Example 45. *Tamerlano*, "Sì, figlia, io moro," meas. 1-10.

*Piano, e lento.*

Bajazet. *Lento.*

*Sì, fi.glia, io mo.ro; ad.di.o! tu re.sti... ahi-mè, che*

*dir non pos.so in pa.ce! tu re.sti, fi.glia, ne.gli af.fan-ni, e que.sto è'l*

Example 46. *Tamerlano*, "Figlia mia, non pianger, nò," meas. 8-14.

*mor-to io nol ve-drò, quando mor-to io nol ve-drò; la.scia al.lo-ra u.sci.re il pian.to, quando mor-to io nol ve-*

*-drò, quando mor-to io nol ve-drò; fi-glia mi-a, non pianger, nò,*



the poison takes its full effect. To illustrate Bajazet's physical pain, the phrases, words, and even syllables of his speech are separated by rests, and are in syncopation with the orchestra (see Example 47). The libretto specified that this section should be sung "as out of breath."<sup>68</sup> A short unison motive with a prominent downward leap of a diminished seventh recurs several times during this section (see Example 47). Handel probably associated this motive with intense tragedy and despair, for it can also be found in the grand *scene* in *Orlando* and *Jephtha*. The *scena* cadences in the tonic G minor as Bajazet collapses on stage. Asteria reacts to her father's death in an impassioned accompanied recitative which leads to her final aria "Padre amato, in me riposa," a *larghetto* lament in F-sharp minor. As in the finale to Act II, which this *scena* balances, all of the emotional tension which has built up during the scene is finally released in this powerful and expansive da capo aria. Bajazet's death scene and Asteria's accompanied recitative and aria, which should be regarded as a single entity, represent one of the greatest and most extended examples of tragic music in Baroque opera and oratorio.

Much of the formal structure of this *scena* is determined by the libretto. This *scena*, like the aria "Forte e lieto," was not taken from the original libretto by Piovene, but from a revised version of that same libretto entitled *Il Bajazet* (1719).<sup>69</sup> Haym or Handel's

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<sup>68</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 178.

<sup>69</sup>Knapp, "Handel's *Tamerlano*: The Creation of an Opera." The following discussion is based upon pp. 424-29 wherein the author compares settings of Handel and Gasparini by quoting musical examples from Gasparini's *Il Bajazet*.







Example 47. *Tamerlano*, "Sù, via, furie e ministre/Mà non cessate!"

*Largo.*

roi que' col-pi son, si: presto, mà non ces-sa-te! ahi-mè!

se stan-che sie-te, la rab-bia mia prende-te, o me-co lo por-ta-te

*pp*

*(Va mancando nel ritirarsi dentro la scena, sostenuto sempre da Austria ed Andronico.)*

là giù nel re-gno del fu-ror e-ter.no! per tormen-tar, per lu-ce-rar quel'

mostro, io sa-rò la mag-gior fu-ria d'a-ver-no.



decision to incorporate these two scenes into the original libretto greatly strengthened the dramatic impact of the opera and the characterization of the hero. Francesco Gasparini set both the original and revised versions of the libretto, and thus his setting of Bajazet's *scena* can be compared with that of Handel. Both composers set the same portions of the text in a similar manner. The similarities are probably due to the strong influence of the text, rather than to any attempt at plagiarism on the part of Handel. However, the differences between the two settings are perhaps more revealing than the similarities. Both composers employ a similar style in the opening section of the *scena*, except that the accompaniment in Gasparini's *scena* consists of a recurring three-note motive in the continuo, rather than the *conciato* passages of the unison orchestra. "Sì, figlia, io moro" is set by both composers as an arioso upon a descending chromatic bass, except that Gasparini again restricts the accompaniment to the continuo, and does not employ the unusual modulations which characterize Handel's setting of this passage. Although Gasparini employs *siciliano* rhythms in "Figlia mia, non pianger, nò," this section is treated as a five-measure arioso passage rather than as a ternary arietta. Both composers employed the *conciato* style in "Io vado le furie a scatenar," but again Gasparini allots this figuration to the continuo. In the final section, a disjointed declamatory style is exploited by both composers. But Handel's distortion of the text into single words and syllables which are set in syncopation with the orchestra more accurately depicts the hero in the throes of death than does the more conventional setting of Gasparini. In general, Gasparini's setting of Bajazet's *scena*, when compared to Handel's, appears to be



more formalized, consisting of a sequence of sections that have more musical than dramatic logic. They are affective in their way, but have less fluidity and realistic emotion than the situation seems to warrant.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Knapp, "Handel's *Tamerlano*: The Creation of an Opera," p. 428.



## CHAPTER 3

### EMOTIONAL CONTENT IN THE ARIAS OF HANDEL

The formal irregularities in Handel's operas are very interesting. They provide valuable insights into the composer's dramatic talents because they are invariably inspired by the dramatic action. For these reasons, they have received the attention of prominent scholars such as Winton Dean and Anthony Lewis. However, the great strength of Handel's operas does not rest solely on these formal experiments. The previous chapter has demonstrated that these formal irregularities can seldom be credited as Handel's innovations, although his treatment of them is often very skillful. Many of the formal irregularities in Handel's operas were determined by the libretti and can also be found in the scores of his contemporaries. In addition, these irregular structures are in a decided minority in most operas. The occasional irregular form does stand out amid the formally rigid background of *opera seria* and when used effectively, it can greatly enhance the drama, but it cannot alter the overall structure of a genre consisting of between twenty and thirty da capo arias. Only in a few exceptional operas—such as *Orlando* and *Serse*—are the da capo arias actually outnumbered by other musical forms. For example, of the forty numbers in *Orlando*, twenty-one are accompanied recitatives, ariettas, ensembles, and sinfonias, while nineteen are da capo arias. This does not imply that *Orlando* and *Serse* are dramatically or musically superior to Handel's





more conventional operas such as *Giulio Cesare* and *Rodelinda*. Although Handel was probably inspired by the opportunities for circumventing and exploiting the rigidity of the convention, his talents were such that he was able to infuse dramatic life and musical genius into even the most regular alternation of da capo aria and simple recitative.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Handel's operas is the strong emotional content conveyed by the arias. Through the conventional medium of the da capo aria, Handel succeeded in depicting portraits of human emotion which are universal and timeless, as relevant to the eighteenth century as to the twentieth century:

This universal quality is, of course, most apparent in those arias that are pure expression of moods, with few or no picturesque external details. The number and variety of these arias is so great, and the power of capturing the most subtle nuances of feeling so astounding, that one is tempted to believe there is no emotion of which humanity is capable that has not found musical expression somewhere in Handel's operas.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Doctrine of the Affections

Handel employed the Doctrine of the Affections in order to highlight the emotional content of his arias, making the affections more intelligible to a large audience. Although the Doctrine of the Affections could facilitate rapid composition (a necessity for a successful opera composer) by limiting the musical possibilities of a given aria, it merely provided the composer with a basic outline or guide. Only the quality of the musical invention could transform this intellectual framework into a viable portrait of human emotion. Handel's treatment

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<sup>1</sup>Grout, *History of Opera*, p. 163.



of the Doctrine of the Affections appears to be derived from certain composers such as Keiser and Steffani who had served as models for him during his youth. While many contemporary Italian composers concentrated on the lyrical/virtuoso aspects of the da capo aria, often to the extent where their arias seem completely divorced from the dramatic situations, Handel, like Keiser and Steffani, concentrated upon the internal emotional drama which occurred in the arias—those points in the opera where the external physical action stops, and the individual character, reacting to the dramatic situation, gives expression to his or her emotions. In these aria situations, time is suspended, and the character, composer, and audience are allowed to savor the emotional atmosphere for the duration of the aria.

Although the emotional range in Handel's arias is very great, the majority of his opera arias can be divided into three basic categories according to the common affections expressed. These three categories of arias correspond closely to those in the operas of Reinhard Keiser.<sup>2</sup> The standard dramatic situations which occur in most *opera seria* libretti determine the three affective categories: arias of sorrow, arias of heroism, and arias of love. The arias of the second and third categories owe their existence to the dramatic principle wherein the actions of the main characters are motivated by the often conflicting affections

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<sup>2</sup>See Rosamond Drooker Brenner, "The Operas of Reinhard Keiser in their Relationship to the *Affektenlehre*," vols. 1-3 (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1968). This dissertation traces in great detail the three basic affective categories found in the opera arias of Keiser. These three affective categories can be applied, on a general level, to the arias of Handel. The categorization is not as systematic or as detailed in Handel's arias, and within each category, subdivisions are evident.



of love and glory or honour. This eternal quest for love and glory usually leads to sorrow, which dominates the arias of the first category, because the ambitions of the characters are never in accord until the finale.

An examination of *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina* shows that a large majority of the arias and ariettas (117 out of 157 arias and ariettas) can be divided into these three basic categories.<sup>3</sup> This categorization is made according to the basic affect of each aria text, although when necessary the dramatic situation and the musical interpretation are also considered. Because the aria texts are often vague, this system of categorization is not intended to be absolute. Some arias are omitted from the classification, while others are rather arbitrarily placed into one or another of the categories (the classification of these arias is to be found in Chart I). In spite of this rather incomplete and arbitrary system, the arias of each category exhibit certain common musical features which were probably associated with a specific affection by the composer.

### Lamenting Arias

The first category consists of those arias which express affections of sorrow, grief, or despair caused by unrequited love, death, or imprisonment. These affections are common in *opera seria* because of the

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<sup>3</sup>The arias from *Orlando* have been left out of this discussion because of their unusual affective content. The texts of Orlando's arias often express madness, while the arias of Angelica and Medoro are often complicated by the fact that these characters are attempting to appease their former lovers by lying to them. Many of the unique aspects of this opera are conditioned by the unusual aria texts.



"succession of sudden shifts of fortune on which the convention depends for its aria situations."<sup>4</sup> Of the 117 affective arias in the operas *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, thirty-three could be considered as arias of lamentation. While not as numerous as the arias in other categories, the laments are perhaps the most important in Handel's operas. The consistently high musical quality of these arias proves that Handel's imagination was inspired by sorrowful or tragic situations. Situations which involve a "rejected, misunderstood, or deserted heroine, a hero betrayed by treachery or languishing in prison, [or] a proud ruler humbled by misfortune" rarely failed to draw from Handel his grandest and most individual creations.<sup>5</sup> Donald J. Grout admirably describes Handel's sensitive reaction to the tragic situations of his characters:

If his characters suffer, the music gives full, eloquent expression to their sorrows—but it never whines; there is not a note in it of self-pity. We are moved by the spectacle of suffering, but our compassion is mingled with admiration at suffering so nobly endured, with pride that we ourselves belong to a species capable of such heroism.<sup>6</sup>

In Handel's operas, the laments provide the musical/dramatic climaxes towards which everything else builds and anticipates. Greater familiarity with the core of Handel's works (the operas and the dramatic oratorios) reveals him as a tragic composer of the stature of Verdi, rather than a composer of choral "fireworks" for which he is esteemed or damned by those with only a superficial knowledge of his works. It is the laments which seem to reveal the essence of Handel's dramatic genius.

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<sup>4</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>6</sup>Grout, *History of Opera*, pp. 167-68.





Joachim Eisenschmidt has demonstrated in his dissertation on the operas of Handel that in certain operas, such as *Rodelinda* and *Lotario*, many of the arias with strong emotional content, particularly the laments, are additions not to be found in the original source libretti.<sup>7</sup> Because of the great musical importance of the laments in Handel's operas, the composer perhaps had some responsibility for their inclusion in the revised libretti. By comparison, the lament does not play as prominent a role in other contemporary operas, often being restricted to the two or three slow-tempo arias in each opera. For example, in Vivaldi's opera *Tito Manlio* (1719), which contains numerous tragic situations, only two arias could be considered as laments.

The arias of lamentation are characterized by their relatively slow tempos, with *Largo* and *Larghetto* being the standard tempo indications. Of the thirty-three laments in the operas *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, twenty-five arias are marked *Largo* or *Larghetto*, while five are marked *Andante* or *Andante larghetto*. (The two remaining arias have no tempo indication, but are obviously intended to be slow.) The laments with faster tempos, such as *Larghetto* and *Andante*, are more frequently found in the later operas, *Ariodante* and *Alcina*; this may reflect the influence of the Neapolitan style with its aversion to slow tempos. Coupled with these slow tempos is a strong preference for the minor mode; twenty-eight of the thirty-three laments in the above-named operas are in the minor mode. This preference for the minor mode can also be seen in certain laments

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<sup>7</sup> Joachim Eisenschmidt, *Die szenische Darstellung der Opern G. F. Händels auf der Londoner Bühne seiner Zeit*, vols. 1 and 2 (Wolfenbüttel and Berlin, 1941).



where the standard modulatory scheme of the first section is modified by employing a modulation to the dominant minor rather than to the usual relative major. (See, for example, the arias "Se pietà di me non senti" in *Giulio Cesare*, "Hò perduto il caro sposo" in *Rodelinda*, and "Ah! mio cor" and "Ombre pallide" from *Alcina*.) The range of keys employed in the laments include all the minor keys available at that time, although E and F-sharp minor are often favored. The use of the minor mode in Handel's laments was not determined solely by the notion that the minor mode was intrinsically sorrowful because of its greater range of harmonic and melodic coloring. Handel employed the minor mode in arias where the emotions are particularly strong and immediate. Thus the minor mode can be used in other arias besides the laments, although it is most common in the arias of this category.<sup>8</sup> Not all of Handel's laments are written in the minor mode. In tragic arias which express sentiments of resignation or submission to a cruel fate, the major mode, in particular E major, is employed, usually in conjunction with triple or compound metre. The arias "Piangerò la sorte mia" from *Giulio Cesare* and "Al sen ti stringo e parto" from *Ariodante*, both in E major, are excellent examples of this type of lament. In the laments, there is also a slight preference for triple and compound metres rather than the standard heroic 4/4 metre; for example nineteen of the thirty-three laments are in either triple or compound metre. In addition, the rhythm in these arias tends to be more flexible and irregular than it is in the arias of other categories. Although long note-values predominate, there is a greater variety of note-values in the laments.

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<sup>8</sup>Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, pp. 60-61.



Only in the arias of lamentation does Handel regularly introduce expressive chromaticism and dissonance into his basically diatonic style of melody and harmony. While his contemporary J.S. Bach employed a complex chromatic style in a variety of contexts, Handel usually reserved the chromatic style for sorrowful or tragic dramatic situations. Even in these tragic situations, however, the chromaticism is used with restraint, and rarely does it approach the intensity of Bachian chromaticism. The chromaticism is restricted to the occasional diminished seventh or Neapolitan chord, or melodic leaps of the tritone, seventh, or ninth. When extensive dissonance and chromaticism are employed, they are usually in tragic arias which express sentiments of despair or anguish, and are used in conjunction with flat minor keys and *Largo* tempo (for example, in the arias "Chi di voi fù più infedele" and "Se'l mio duol non è sì forte" in *Rodelinda* and "Cieca notte, infidi sguardi" in *Ariodante*).

The melodic style in Handel's arias of lamentation is generally characterized by short declamatory phrases separated by rests. These short phrases are often organized into larger periods creating the effect of long lyrical lines. A favorite technique of organization is to increase the phrase-lengths gradually through motivic extension in order to create a sense of climax prior to the cadence. The lamenting melodies are also characterized by their general downward motion and the frequent use of sighing figures—descending seconds—often in slurred groups of two. Coloratura is generally avoided. When it is employed, it is relegated to a few brief melismas which are exploited for their expressive rather than for their virtuoso qualities. For example, of the thirty-three laments under consideration, one contains



coloratura passages and fourteen contain melismas, with the remainder set syllabically throughout.

In many laments, the usual interaction between the voice and the orchestra is altered. While in the majority of Handel's arias, there exists some type of thematic relationship between the voice and the orchestra, in many laments the orchestra is given an independent part. In some laments, the orchestra provides a non-thematic homophonic accompaniment above which the vocal part unfolds ("Scherza infida" in *Ariodante* and "Ah! mio cor" in *Alcina*), while in other arias the orchestra is given its own independent thematic material with which it concertizes with the voice (Se pietà di me non senti" in *Giulio Cesare* and "Se'l mio duol" in *Rodelinda*). The orchestral accompaniments are characteristically allotted to the string orchestra, which is usually divided into four parts. When this string orchestra is expanded, usually the solo transverse flute, or the transverse flute combined with recorders are added, rather than the customary oboes. Of the thirty-three laments under consideration, eighteen are scored for strings and eight are scored for strings and flutes. Although the oboes are generally avoided in the laments, the bassoons are occasionally employed in short solo passages in the tenor register. Because of the primary importance Handel gave to the laments, expansive formal structures are usually employed which, combined with the slow tempos, make the laments very long and accentuate their position in the opera.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For specific examples of lamenting arias, see the above discussion on the double affection arias. In these arias, one can observe the various techniques Handel employed in order to depict the contrasting affections of sorrow and vengeance. See also the above discussion on the thematic development in the aria "Se pietà di me non senti."





Many of the laments are based upon the stylized dance rhythms of the *siciliano* and the saraband. The *siciliano* aria represents an important subdivision within the arias of lamentation. Most of Handel's operas contain at least one *siciliano* lament: examples include "Son nato a sospirar" in *Giulio Cesare*, "Se non mi vuol amar" in *Tamerlano*, "Invida sorte avara" in *Ariodante*, and "Mi restano le lagrime" in *Alcina*. These arias are easily distinguished because of their characteristic 12/8 metre, *Larghetto* tempo, and minor mode. In addition, the melodic style of the *siciliano* arias is generally more conjunct and less chromatic than it is in the other laments, and the melodic phrases tend to be longer and less fragmented. The *cantabile* vocal melodies are often supported by simple chordal orchestral accompaniments in four or five parts. Because of the essentially simple, lyrical style of the *siciliano*, the sentiments conveyed tend to be melancholic or elegiac rather than tragic, and are usually concerned with the sorrowful aspects of love. Unlike the *siciliano*, the *pastorale* can be used in a variety of dramatic situations—sorrowful, amorous, or pictorial. When the *pastorale* is employed as a lament, it usually conveys sentiments similar to those in other major-mode laments—the resignation or submission to cruel fate (for example, "Con rauco mormorio" in *Rodelinda* and "Al sen ti stringo e parto" in *Ariodante*).<sup>10</sup>

The saraband aria is a triple-metre lament characterized by the emphasis placed upon the second beat of the measure. In the saraband arias, Handel employs the modern 3/4 and 3/8 metre rather than the

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<sup>10</sup> Sirvart Poladian, "Handel as an Opera Composer" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1946), pp. 187-96.



traditional 3/2 metre associated with the dance. Although the emphasis on the second beat is created primarily through rhythm, it is also effected by melodic, harmonic, textural, and orchestral factors. While in some arias, the saraband rhythms are clear and consistent (as in "Deh! lasciatemi il nemico" and "Padre amato" in *Tamerlano*), the rhythms are usually so stylized that only the effect of the saraband, with its serious and aristocratic connotations is suggested. In most arias, this effect is created by the large proportion of phrases that begin or end on the second beat of the measure and the admixture of saraband measures with measures in which the second beat is neutralized or avoided, creating subtle rhythmic syncopations. The saraband rhythm can be observed to a greater or lesser extent in most of Handel's triple-metre laments. For example, this dance rhythm is suggested in all eleven triple-metre laments in *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*. With regards to other aspects of musical style—melody, harmony, orchestration, and texture—the saraband arias do not greatly differ from the laments in quadruple metre.<sup>11</sup>

### Heroic Arias

The second category consists of those arias expressing heroic emotions. Unlike the first and third categories, the arias of this group can express a great variety of emotions ranging from vengeance, anger, and disdain, to pride, heroism, and triumph. Because of the wide range of emotions, the characteristic features are more variable and less specific. In general, the affections of these arias are more

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<sup>11</sup>Sirvart Poladian, "Handel as an Opera Composer," pp. 196-98.



extrovert as opposed to the more intimate emotions of the first and third categories, and this fact is reflected in the music. In keeping with the extrovert nature of this category, most of the arias are characterized by fast tempos, *Allegro* being the standard tempo indication: of the forty-four heroic arias in the operas *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, thirty-seven are given *Allegro* tempo indications. Coupled with the fast tempos is a strong preference for quadruple metre. For example, quadruple metre is employed in thirty of the forty-four heroic arias in the above-named operas. The rhythms in both the instrumental and vocal parts are written in small note-values and are usually very regular, with few rhythmic subtleties; passages of continuous sixteenth-notes can be found in most of these arias. Melodies and harmonies are generally diatonic, with an emphasis on scalar and triadic melodies, strong tonic/dominant harmonies, and a regular rate of chord-change. One of the most characteristic features of the arias in this category is the large quantity of virtuoso, instrumentally-conceived coloratura. Virtuoso coloratura passages can be found in thirty-nine of the forty-four heroic arias under consideration; of these thirty-nine arias, thirty-one contain three or more coloratura passages. Handel, like most of his contemporaries, associated fast-tempo coloratura arias in quadruple metre with heroic situations. The extrovert nature of the heroic arias is emphasized by the frequent use of similes in the aria texts, usually concerned with some type of natural phenomena. The simile, providing it is not too unreasonable, does not destroy or negate the basic affection, but rather colors it, giving the composer some type of concrete imagery. A master such as Handel usually succeeded in depicting the image without interfering with the interpretation of the overall affect.



The arias of this category can be divided into two basic types, those expressing strictly heroic emotions such as bravery, triumph, and pride, and those expressing violent heroic emotions such as vengeance, anger, and disdain. This subdivision may appear even more arbitrary and artificial than the overall categorization of the arias, because the differences between some of these emotions may be very slight. However, an analysis of Handel's heroic arias—especially those from his middle-period operas—shows two distinctly different musical interpretations of the heroic affections which correspond with these two subdivisions.

The arias expressing violent emotions tend to favor the minor mode, especially keys with several flats such as G and C minor. Of the nineteen heroic arias of this type in *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, and *Rodelinda*, thirteen arias are in the minor mode—five in G minor and four in C minor. As in the laments, the minor mode is employed in order to emphasize the strength and immediacy of the emotion. In the violent heroic arias, the standard quadruple metre is often replaced by other metres: eight of the nineteen heroic arias of this type in the above-named operas are in triple metre. The orchestral accompaniments to these violent heroic arias, in contrast to the arias of other categories, seem to have been restricted to the string orchestra. For example, fifteen of the nineteen arias under consideration are accompanied by the string orchestra; of the remaining four arias, the lack of any *tutti/solo* indications and the virtuoso violinistic figuration in the orchestral parts perhaps suggest that Handel intended the *tutti* scoring to mean *tutti violini*, as Chrysander recommends in the published scores. The orchestral accompaniments in these arias are usually





divided into two parts, as is the case in thirteen of the nineteen arias under consideration. In spite of the thin orchestration, the textures of the violent heroic arias, including those in later operas, are strongly contrapuntal. The vigorous and extensive thematic development characteristic of these arias accounts for the contrapuntal textures. The orchestra usually plays an active role in the thematic development, and it usually maintains a concerto-like interaction with the voice.<sup>12</sup> These lively orchestral parts often exploit *concitato* figuration, such as measured trills, tremolos, repeated notes, and unison passages. The violent emotions of these arias are also enhanced by the extremely disjunct and angular style of the melodic lines. This unusually disjunct melodic style is common in the bass arias, which are often of this type because bass singers were traditionally given villainous roles. Rapid descending scale passages are often introduced at the ends of melodic phrases in order to create further contrasts, and perhaps for pictorial imagery.<sup>13</sup> These disjunct melodic phrases ending in rapid descending scale passages are especially common in the vengeance arias from *Rodelinda*, such as "L'empio rigor del fato," "Di Cupido impiego," "Morrai sì, l'empia," "Tirannia gli diede," and "Tuo drudo è mio rivale."

The heroic arias, which express emotions such as bravery, triumph, and pride, are invariably set in the major mode, with the keys of C, F, B-flat and D major especially favored. These four keys account

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<sup>12</sup>See the above analysis of the thematic development in the aria "Morrai sì"; in spite of the unusual key of E major, it is an excellent example of the vengeance aria.

<sup>13</sup>Poladian, "Handel as an Opera Composer," p. 180.



for fifteen of the seventeen heroic arias of this type in *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*. Although the thematic development in this type of aria can be extensive as in the violent heroic arias, more often it is rather relaxed. Because of this more relaxed approach to development, the contrapuntal textures and active orchestral accompaniments characteristic of the violent heroic arias are less common in these arias. However, these arias exhibit more variety in orchestration and texture. The string orchestra can be divided into two, three, or four parts, and oboes and bassoons are frequently added to strengthen and color the sound of the strings. For example, nine of the seventeen heroic arias under consideration employ a *tutti* orchestra of strings, oboes, and bassoons. When the heroic instruments, the trumpets, timpani, and horns, are employed in Handel's arias, they are almost always employed in arias of this type—hence the preference for the trumpet keys of D and C and the horn key of F major. Even when these instruments are not employed, their influence can be heard in the fanfare-like melodies which are often found in the heroic arias of this type. These melodies usually begin with some type of ascending movement in order to convey a sense of "rising energy implicit in the texts."<sup>14</sup> The numerous brilliant coloratura passages which are exploited to create an impression of strength and heroism make this type of aria the primary vehicle for virtuoso display in Handel's operas. Although these arias are often criticized for being merely excuses for vocal acrobatics, arias such as *Giulio Cesare's* "Al lampo

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<sup>14</sup>Poladian, "Handel as an Opera Composer," p. 177.



dell' armi," Bajazet's "Ciel e terra armi di sdegno," Ariodante's "Dopo notte, atra e funesta," Polinesso's "Dover, giustizia, amor," and Ruggiero's "Stà nell' Ircana," contradict this criticism. These excellent compositions skillfully portray the heroic affections of the text and contribute greatly to the characterization of the hero.

### Amorous Arias

The love interest in the plots of *opera seria* is very prominent, and in most operas the characters are defined by their love relationships. For example, at the head of many *opera seria* libretti, the names of the characters are followed by designations such as "amante di," "moglie di," and "promesso sposo di." Therefore, the third large category of arias consists of those expressing affections of love. Mattheson stated that love is the most important affection in an opera, and from this basic affection are derived many secondary affections such as "jealousy, sorrow, hope, pleasure, revenge, rage, frenzy, all of which will add variety to a work."<sup>15</sup> In addition, many of the arias which fall into the lamenting or vengeance categories are motivated by betrayed or unrequited love.

A majority of the arias in this category are characterized by their relatively moderate tempos, *Andante* being the most common tempo indication. For example, of the forty-four arias in the operas *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina* which could be classified in this category, twenty-seven are in moderate tempos, of which fourteen are designated as *Andante*. Because the amorous arias

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<sup>15</sup>Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, p. 219.



are usually dominated by pleasing emotions, there is a strong preference for the major mode. The range of keys employed in the amorous arias is fairly wide, but G, A, and E-flat major are especially favored. Thirty-seven of the forty-four amorous arias in the above-named operas are in the major mode; of these thirty-seven, twenty-one are in the keys of either A, G, or E-flat major. The choice of metres in these arias is more flexible than in the arias of other categories, although 4/4 is still predominant; for example, fifteen arias are in triple metre (3/4 or 3/8), eight are in compound metre (6/8 or 12/8), and three are in duple metre.

The influence of the dance can be observed in many of the amorous arias: the minuet in "Venere bella" from *Giulio Cesare*, "Prigioniera hò l'alma" from *Rodelinda*, and "Prendi da questa mano" from *Ariodante*; the gavotte in "Se in fiorito ameno prato" from *Giulio Cesare* and "Se rinasce nel cor" from *Ariodante*; the gigue in "Caro! più amabile" and "Tu la mia stella sei" from *Giulio Cesare* and "Volate, amori" from *Ariodante*; the bourrée in "Spero per voi, sì" from *Ariodante* and "E'gelosia, forza è d'amore" from *Alcina*; the pastorale in "Par che mi nasca" from *Tamerlano* and "Ritorna, oh caro" from *Rodelinda*; the courante in "Del mio sol" from *Ariodante*; the corrente in "Tutto può donna" from *Giulio Cesare*; and, the allemande in "Ama sospira" from *Alcina*. Unlike the dance airs in French opera, which are usually a vocal parody of the preceding dance in the *divertissement*, the dance rhythms in Handel's amorous arias are highly stylized, and generally the dance is only suggested. These stylized dance rhythms are often combined with more homophonically conceived textures and song-like





melodies which create a certain lightness and gaiety suitable to many amorous affections.<sup>16</sup>

Coloratura is treated with a fair degree of flexibility in the amorous arias. In twenty-four of the forty-four amorous arias under consideration, coloratura is either completely avoided or is restricted to one or two passages. And when it does occur, the coloratura is generally more lyrical than virtuoso in character. As in the second type of heroic arias, the orchestration of the amorous arias is relatively varied, and no particular orchestral coloring can be associated with this category. The strings are frequently doubled by the oboes and bassoons (thirteen of the forty-four amorous arias under consideration), and obbligato instruments are sometimes employed (five of the forty-four arias). Although four-part accompaniments are the most common, the accompaniment does vary from one to six parts.<sup>17</sup>

Within this category are two types of love arias which do not conform to all of the characteristics listed above. In arias expressing sentiments of joyous or capricious love, fast tempos are usually employed, often in conjunction with virtuoso coloratura. Although these arias are similar to the heroic arias and often serve as substitutes for them in certain female roles, they can be distinguished from heroic arias by the stylized dance rhythms, homophonic textures, and song-like melodies. (See, for example, the arias "Tutto può donna,"

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<sup>16</sup>See Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1947), pp. 128-29. This author divides Handel's arias into five categories of which four are based upon dance rhythms. However, he does not provide much evidence to support his ideas.

<sup>17</sup>For specific examples of amorous arias, see the above discussions on the arias "Di, cor mio," and "Mio bel tesoro," and the duet "Unisca amor in noi."



"Se in fiorito ameno prato," and "Venere bella" from *Giulio Cesare*.) In arias expressing the pains of love, desire, or lust, the minor mode is frequently used in order to convey a sense of urgency. When this type of aria has violent or sinister overtones, as when a tyrant intends to satisfy his desires by force, fast tempos are often employed, creating the effect of a vengeance aria. (See, for example, "Tu sei cor di questo core" from *Giulio Cesare* and "Dammi pace" from *Tamerlano*.)

In Sirvart Poladian's dissertation "Handel as an Opera Composer," Handel's opera arias are categorized according to tempo: fast-tempo arias, moderate-tempo arias, and slow-tempo arias. In spite of the different criteria, the categorization of arias according to tempo produces similar results to the above categorization defined by the affection. The similar results are due to the close relationship that existed between tempo and mood or affect during the eighteenth century, as is evident in the literal definitions of many Italian tempo indications. In her dissertation, Poladian concludes that slow-tempo arias are primarily concerned with sorrowful affections, moderate-tempo arias with amorous affections, and fast-tempo arias with heroic affections. The musical characteristics of these categories are also similar to those in the affective categories described above. Because of the large number of fast-tempo arias, this category includes a greater range of affections than strictly heroic ones. Thus the fast-tempo amorous arias are categorized as fast-tempo arias rather than amorous arias.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>See also Bruno Flögel, "Studien zur Arienteknik in den Opern Händels," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 2 (1929):50-156, which appears to be the source for Poladian's theory.



Chart I. Categorization of the arias in  
*Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*,  
 and *Aleina* according to the three basic affections.

Lamenting Arias

*Giulio Cesare*

Priva son d'ogni conforto  
 Nel tuo seno (arietta)  
 Son nato a sospirar (duet)  
 Deh piangete (arietta)  
 Se pietà di me non senti  
 Piangerò la sorte mia (d a)

D Largo  
 g Largo, e Staccato  
 e Largo  
 a Largo  
 f# Largo  
 E (slow)

3/8 str a 4, fl  
 C orch a 3  
 12/8 str a 4  
 C continuo  
 C str a 4, bsn  
 3/8 str a 3, fl

*Tamerlano*

Se non mi vuol amar  
 Deh! lasciatemi  
 A suoi piedi  
 Se potessi un dì placare  
 Cor di padre  
 Vivo in te  
 Padre amato (d a)

e Larghetto  
 b Larghetto  
 a Andante  
 B<sup>1</sup> (slow)  
 g Largo e staccato  
 e Larghetto  
 f# Larghetto

12/8 tutti a 4  
 3/4 str a 4, fl  
 3/8 orch a 2  
 3/8 tutti a 2  
 C tutti a 4  
 C str a 4, 2 fl, 2 rec  
 3/4 orch a 2

*Rodelinda*

Io perduto il caro sposo  
 Ombre, piante  
 Con rauco mormorio  
 Io t'abbraccio (duet)  
 Chi di voi (scena)  
 Se'l mio duol

c Largo  
 b Largo  
 E<sup>1</sup> Larghetto  
 f# Larghetto  
 b Largo  
 f Largo

3/4 orch a 4  
 3/8 str a 4, fl  
 12/8 str a 4, fl, 2 rec, bsn  
 C orch a 3  
 3/4 orch a 3  
 C orch a 3, rec, bsn

Abbreviations

(d a)—double affection aria  
 str—strings  
 orch—unspecified orchestra  
 (slow, moderate, or fast)—unspecified tempo  
 a 2, 3, or 4—in two three or four parts

fl—flute  
 rec—recorder  
 bsn—bassoon  
 ob—oboe  
 hn—horn



## *Ariodante*

Scherza infida  
Se tanto piace (arietta)  
Invida sorte avara  
Il mio crudel martoro  
Numi! lasciarmi vivere (arietta)  
Cieca notte  
Io ti bacio  
Al sen ti stringo e parto

g (slow)  
e Larghetto  
f Larghetto  
e Larghetto  
d Larghetto  
c largo, e staccato  
d Larghetto assai  
E Larghetto

3/4 str a 4 muted, bsn  
6/8 str a 4  
12/8 orch a 4  
C orch a 2  
C str a 4  
C orch a 2  
C str a 4  
12/8 str a 4, 2 fl

## *Aleina*

Chi m'insegna il caro padre?  
Sì: son quella  
Ah! mio cor! (d a)  
Ombre pallide  
Credete al mio dolore  
Mi restano lagrime

a Andante  
a Andante larghetto  
c Andante larghetto  
e Andante  
d Larghetto  
f# Larghetto

C continuo  
3/4 continuo  
3/4 orch a 4  
C str a 4  
C continuo, cello  
12/8 orch a 4

## Heroic Arias

## *Giulio Cesare*

Type I  
Empio, dirò, tu sei  
Svegliatevi nel core (d a)  
L'empio, sleale, indegno  
Sì spietata  
L'angue offeso  
L'aure che spira  
Domerò la tua fierezza  
La Giustizia  
Type II  
Presti omai (arietta)  
Va tacito e nascosto  
Al lampo dell'armi  
Dal fulgor di questa spada  
Quel torrente

c Allegro  
c (fast)  
E<sup>f</sup> Allegro e staccato  
C Allegro e staccato  
c Andante  
e Allegro e staccato  
e Allegro e staccato  
g Allegro

C tutti a 2  
C str a 2  
3/8 orch a 2  
C orch a 4  
3/4 tutti a 4  
3/4 str a 4, ob  
C str a 2  
C str a 2

3/8 tutti a 4  
C str a 4, hn  
C str a 2  
3/8 orch a 2  
3/8 tutti a 2





*Tamerlano*

## Type I

Non è più tempo  
più d'una tigre altero  
A dispetto d'un volto ingrato  
Empio, per farti guerra

## Type I

Forte e lieto  
Ciel e terra  
Bella gara

A Allegro  
F Allegro  
D Allegro  
g Allegro  
C Largo  
D Allegro  
B<sup>1</sup> Allegro

str a 2  
tutti a 2  
orch a 2  
orch a 4  
3/4  
orch a 4  
str a 4  
str a 2  
tutti a 3

*Rodelinda*

## Type II

L'empio rigor del fato  
Di Cupido impiego  
Morrai sì  
Confusa si miri l'infida  
De'miei scherni  
Tirannia gli diede  
Tuo drudo è mio rivale

## Type II

Io già t'amai  
Lo farò, dirò spietato  
Spietati, io vi giurai  
Se fiera belva

g Allegro  
c Allegro  
E Allegro  
b Allegro  
g Allegro  
d Allegro  
g Allegro

3/8 orch a 2  
3/8 orch a 2  
C str a 2  
3/8 tutti a 2  
6/8 orch a 4  
C orch a 2  
C str a 4

B<sup>1</sup> Allegro e staccato

F Allegro  
B<sup>1</sup> Allegro  
C Allegro

tutti a 3  
tutti a 3  
str a 4, 2 ob  
orch a 3

*Ariodante*

## Type I

Orrida a gl'occhi miei  
Tu vivi, e punito  
Se l'inganno  
Il tuo sangue

## Type II

Voli colla sua tromba  
Dover, giustizia, amor  
Dopo notte  
Tu preparati a morire (d a)

F Allegro  
G Allegro  
a Andante  
G Allegro

orch a 4  
orch a 2  
str a 4  
str a 4

3/8 tutti a 4, 2 hr  
C tutti a 4  
3/4 str a 4  
C str a 4



*Aleina*

Type 1				
Pensa a chi geme	e	Larghetto andante		
Vorrei vendicarmi	D	Allegro	12/8	orch a 2
Ma quando tornerai (d a)	F	Allegro	C	orch a 3
Barbara; io ben lo sò	A	Allegro	C	str a 2
Type 11				
Stà nell'Ircana	G	Allegro	C	str a 4
				tutti a 4, 2 hn

*Amorous Arias**Giulio Cesare*

Non disperar	E	Allegro, ma non troppo		
Non è sì vago	E	Allegro	C	str a 3
Tutto può donna	A	Allegro	C	tutti a 2
Tu la mia stella sei	B <sup>b</sup>	Allegro, ma non troppo	3/8	str a 3, ob
Tu sei il cor	d	Allegro	6/8	orch a 2
V'adoro, pupille	F	Largo	C	str a 2
Se in fiorito ameno prato	G	Allegro	3/4	double orch a 8, viol
Venere bella	A	Andante e staccato	C	tutti a 4, 2 bsn, vl
Aure, deh, per pietà (scena)	F	Andante e piano	C	orch a 2
Caro più amabile (duet)	G	Allegro, ma non troppo	3/8	str a 4
			3/8	str a 4
			12/8	tutti a 4

*Tamerlano*

Bella Asteria	D	Largo	C	continuo
Dammi pace	g	Allegro	C	orch a 2
Benche mi sprezzì	E <sup>f</sup>	Andante	3/4	tutti a 4
Cerco in vano	E <sup>b</sup>	Andante	3/8	orch a 4
Par che mi nasca	C	Larghetto	12/8	str a 4, 2 cornetti
Vedrai ch'un dì cangiar (duet)	G	(moderate)	C	orch a 2

*Rodelinda*

Dove sei?	E	Largo	3/8	tutti a 4
Prigioniera hò l'alma	A	Allegro	3/8	orch a 4
Ritorna, oh caro	G	Andante	12/8	orch a 4
Mio caro bene!	G	Allegro	C	tutti a 3



*Ariodante*

Vezzi, lusinghe (arietta)	G Andante	3/4	str a 4
Apri le luce	b Andante	C	str a 4
Quì d'amor (arietta)	E <sup>f</sup> Andante larghetto	C	tutti a 5
Volate, amori	B Allegro	6/8	tutti a 4
Con l'ali di costanza	A Allegro	C	str a 4
Spero per voi, sì	F Allegro, ma non troppo	2/4	str a 4
Il primo ardor	B <sup>f</sup> Allegro	C	tutti a 4
Prendi da questa mano	A (moderate)	3/8	str a 4
Del mio sol	e Andante	3/4	str a 4
Se rinasce nel cor (duet)	F A tempo di Gavotta	2/4	tutti a 3
Spera, io già mi pento (duet)	A Andante	3/4	str a 3
Bramo haver mille cori (duet)	A (moderate)	C	str a 3

*Aleina*

O s'apre al riso	A Andante	3/8	orch a 4
Di, cor mio	B <sup>f</sup> Andante larghetto	C	tutti a 4
E'gelosia, forza d'amore	D Allegro	2/4	orch a 4
Tornami a vagheggiar	B <sup>f</sup> Allegro	3/4	tutti a 3
Col celarvi (arietta)	g Largo	C	orch a 4
Mi lusingi il dolce affetto	E <sup>f</sup> Andante larghetto	6/8	orch a 4
Mio bel tesoro	g Andante	6/8	tutti a 4, 2 rec
E'un folle, è un vile affeto	G Allegro	C	orch a 4
Un momento di contento	A Andante allegro	3/4	orch a 2
Ama, sospira	a Andante	6/8	tutti a 4, vl



The familiar Baroque technique of word-painting is also part of the Doctrine of the Affections, although by itself, it should not be mistaken for the Doctrine. Word-painting is a secondary aspect of the Doctrine of the Affections because it is concerned with the representation of certain external details rather than with the basic internal substance of the aria text. Instead of depicting the overall affection of the entire text, the composer momentarily seizes upon a single word or phrase and depicts it with the appropriate musical figure. The musical figures acquired meaning only by association with the textual image, and often the same figure could be used in a variety of contexts.<sup>19</sup> Word-painting in Handel's arias is usually relegated to the coloratura passages where certain picturesque words such as "volate" (as in "Volate, amori"), "gloria" (as in "Dover, giustizia, amor"), and "gioja" (as in "Dopo notte, atra e funesta" from *Ariodante*) are all depicted by virtuoso coloratura passages. Word-painting of a more elaborate kind is more common in the simile arias. Although Handel probably enjoyed depicting these picturesque images, they usually remain as specific details in the overall affective framework of the aria. One of the finest examples of this type of aria is "L'angue offeso mai riposa" from *Giulio Cesare*, in which Sesto compares his desire for revenge to the angered snake waiting to strike its victim. The slithering movements of the snake are depicted by the active orchestral parts, especially by the bass, while the image of the snake spilling its poison into the blood of the victim is depicted by the coloratura passages on the words "spande" (spill) and "sangue" (blood).

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<sup>19</sup> Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era*, p. 389.





Example 48. *Giulio Cesare*, "L'angue offeso mai riposa," meas. 36-41.

The musical score for Example 48 is a vocal line from *Giulio Cesare*, measures 36-41. It is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is highly rhythmic, featuring many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, creating a sense of urgency and intensity. The lyrics are: "sor, se il ve le no pria non span". The score is presented on a single system with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp.

Rather than detracting from the basic affection, this musical imagery enhances Sesto's fanatical desire for revenge. However, sometimes the simile of the aria text assumes too much importance, or is irrelevant to the dramatic situation and thus obscures the basic affection. In these circumstances, Handel usually seizes upon the imagery of the simile and writes a descriptive programmatic piece of music. These arias are often very charming, especially if the simile is colorful, but without a clearly defined affection, the music tends to be of a more conventional mould. Handel's approach to opera is inherently dramatic, and he required strong affective dramatic situations and aria texts in order to create his most inspired music.

Although most of Handel's arias are based on one of three basic affections, a large range of emotions is possible within each affective category. Some of the more obvious variants have been singled out because of their distinctive musical treatment. However, an analysis of this type cannot give any clue as to the depth of emotional range and the subtlety of shading found within the arias of a given category, because these are conveyed through the music itself—the melodies and harmonies, which, at their best, seem to perfectly match



and enhance the basic sentiments of the text and of the dramatic situation. The Doctrine of the Affections—like the da capo aria—merely provided the abstract framework or outline. It could convey the basic affection to the listener, but it was the music which determined whether this affection acquired any sense of depth and shading.

### Musical Characterization

It is often considered that musical characterization in opera is a product of the Romanticism of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and is first evident in the masterpieces of Mozart. It is considered that musical characterization was impossible in the "dark ages" of opera because the audiences and the composers regarded opera as a concert in costume designed solely to display the talents of the egotistical singers. Besides the needs of the singers, the academic theories of the Doctrine of the Affections ruled out musical characterization because "the role of the character is subservient to the consistent emotional expression by particular textual and musical factors."<sup>20</sup> Although this judgment can be applied with justice to many eighteenth-century operas, it cannot be applied to the operas of Handel. No one who has studied these works can fail to be impressed by the skillful musical characterization to be found in the scores. Even the most unsuccessful and unknown operas contain at least one character who is brought to life through the music. Because of the static nature of *opera seria*, with most of the dramatic action taking place in the

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<sup>20</sup>Brenner, "The Operas of Reinhard Keiser," p. 188.



recitative, Handel concentrated on this depiction of human emotion and personality through the music of the arias.

Most of Handel's characters are based on the stock types found in all eighteenth-century *opera seria* libretti: the brave conqueror (Giulio Cesare), the lamenting princess (Asteria), the faithful wife (Rodelinda), the brutal tyrant (Tolomeo), the scheming advisor (Garibaldo), and the loyal friend (Unulfo). The characters, like the emotions they express, were not intended to be unique and individual, but universal and idealized in keeping with the classical principles of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, principles which found their most perfect expression in the tragedies of Corneille and Racine. However, the characters in Italian opera never attain the universal grandeur of an Andromaque or Phedre, and usually remain little more than two-dimensional sketches. Thus the effect of characterization in the operas of Handel is achieved primarily through the music. In operas such as *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Orlando*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, the music seems to say much more about the characters than does the libretto. Through his music, Handel succeeded in elevating these stock, two-dimensional characters into

universal, ideal types of humanity, moving and thinking on a vast scale, the analogue in opera of the great tragic personages of Corneille. This quality is more than the reflection of a certain musical style or a consummate technique; it is the direct emanation of Handel's own spirit, expressed in music with an immediacy that has no parallel outside Beethoven. It is the incarnation of a great soul.<sup>21</sup>

The musical characterization in Handel's operas stems from his skillful and sensitive depiction of the Doctrine of the Affections.

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<sup>21</sup>Grout, *History of Opera*, p. 167.



Through his music, the vague generalized sentiments expressed in the aria texts are transformed into viable portraits of human emotion. The vitality of the emotions expressed in the arias in turn animates the characters. These characters emerge as the sum total of the affective content of their arias. "Each character is presented one facet at a time, aria by aria, until he stands complete."<sup>22</sup> The musical characterization in Handel's operas often consists of more than merely the sensitive realization of the Doctrine of the Affections. Because the characters emerge as the total of all their arias, some type of relationship between the arias of a given character is often necessary in order for a consistent character portrait to be created.

The conventions of *opera seria* dictated that each role should consist of one or two arias of each type to allow the singers to display their voices to the best advantage. If treated carefully by the composer, this convention could assist in characterization by showing a character in a great variety of moods. In this way the character would sometimes achieve a dynamic rather than a static quality, especially if the aria types were arranged so as to create the impression of character development. The great character portrait of Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* is created in this manner. However, this convention made characterization difficult because the individual roles could result in a series of contrasting arias with no overall unity. The characters would lose their individuality and become puppets of the dramatic situation. One of the ways Handel avoided this type of inconsistent characterization was to allow certain characters to be

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<sup>22</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 43.





dominated by a single affection. These characters were given a large proportion of arias of a single affective category, and in this way their music was set apart from that of the other characters. This type of characterization often involved the modification or manipulation of the Doctrine of the Affections. This modification was facilitated by the vague nature of many aria texts which could be interpreted as representing several different affections. Thus, in his most successful operas, Handel achieved a delicate balance between the Doctrine of the Affections and the need for musical characterization.

In most of Handel's operas, one can distinguish two or three main characters. These characters are determined by their importance in the opera and by the type of music the composer allotted to them. Thus the main singing roles, the *prima donna* and the *primo uomo*, need not necessarily be the main characters. For example, if the *primo uomo* is given a large but undramatic role, while a cadet singer is given a small but dramatic one, usually the latter will emerge as the main character solely through the strength of his or her music. The relationships between the characters in Handel's operas has an important impact upon musical characterization. As in the works of the acknowledged operatic masters—Mozart, Wagner, and Verdi—the characters in Handel's operas receive much of their individuality and identity through their interaction with each other. In Handel's finest operas, a series of relationships between the characters is created. Often a dynamic character is balanced by a static or constant character, while the other characters serve as foils to enhance the stature of these main characters. It is therefore more profitable to consider Handel's techniques of characterization within the context of the individual operas rather than as isolated phenomena.



### Characterization in Tamerlano

In the opera *Tamerlano*, the two main characters are Bajazet, the deposed Ottoman Emperor and his daughter, Asteria. Handel seems to have been inspired by these two tragic figures, and by comparison, the other characters in the opera fade into the background. In this opera, Asteria is the constant character—the epitome of the lamenting heroine. All but one of her six arias, her duet, and her arietta, are in the lamenting category. Therefore, her music is characterized by slow tempos, minor keys, triple or compound metres, chromatic melodies and harmonies, and the absence of virtuoso coloratura. This unusual role, with its conspicuous absence of *bravura* arias, is all the more surprising because it was conceived for the famous *prima donna* Cuzzoni.

The characterization in *Tamerlano* is complicated because the love relationships presented the composer with two lamenting heroines. Irene, Princess of Trabisonda, is betrayed by Tamerlano, who has fallen in love with Asteria, while Asteria is betrayed by Andronico, who is attempting to save the lives of both Asteria and Bajazet by complying with Tamerlano's wishes. The analogous love relationships of the two heroines is mirrored in the common affective content to be found in many of their aria texts; several of these arias could be easily interchanged without doing damage to the drama. For example, Asteria's first two arias, "Se non mi vuol amar" and "Deh! lasciatemi il nemico" and Irene's "Dal crudel che m'ha tradita" and "Crudel più non son io" could be interchanged because both express the sorrow and anger of betrayed love. In spite of the similarities, Handel created two completely contrasting roles by emphasizing the sorrowful and tragic aspects of Asteria's character, and by negating them in Irene's character.



In order to achieve these contrasts in the music of his two heroines, it was sometimes necessary to modify or manipulate the affections of their arias, although the vague nature of many of their aria texts facilitated this modification. For example, in Act I when Asteria learns of Andronico's treachery, her arias "Se non mi vuol amar" and "Deh! lasciatemi il nemico" could have been set as vengeance arias, but instead were set as *Larghetto* laments in the minor mode. A similar manipulation can be found in Asteria's aria "Se potessi un di placare" which occurs at the end of Act II after Asteria has been forced to reveal her plans of revenge in order to save her honor. The rather obscure aria text could have been set as an aria expressing hope or heroism, but instead was set as a lament of resignation. The key of B-flat major and the accompaniment of two-part *tutti* orchestra, both characteristic features of the heroic arias, contribute to the unique qualities of this lament. In *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Ariodante*, and *Alcina*, only two other laments are scored for *tutti* orchestra—Asteria's "Se non mi vuol amar" and "Cor di padre, e cor d'amante." The use of the oboes to double the violin lines gives these arias a piercing sonority which is not generally associated with the Handelian lament. The only aria in Asteria's role which is not set as a lament, "Non è più tempo, nò, un altro stringerò" from Act II, is also the only aria in which Asteria attempts to hide her true emotions by haughtily rejecting Andronico.

In Act III, Asteria emerges as a tragic heroine. There are no more love laments, because now Asteria, her father, and her lover are all threatened with death and dishonor at the hands of Tamerlano. Her two arias "Cor di padre, e cor d'amante" and "Padre amato, in me riposa"



and her duet with Andronico "Vivo in te" are slow-tempo, minor-mode laments written in Handel's grand tragic manner. The tragic style is also evident in Asteria's two accompanied recitatives in this act. By way of comparison, Gasparini's settings of Asteria's arias in Act III of his version of *Tamerlano* (1710) are both in the major mode in fast to moderate tempos, and employ a simple diatonic style.<sup>23</sup>

In Irene's arias, Handel chose to ignore the affections of sorrow and vengeance, and allotted to her role music of an optimistic, if somewhat neutral cast. Most of her music is conceived in the "serene" key of G major, in common metre, and in fast tempos. Of her five set pieces—three arias, an arietta, and a duet with Tamerlano—four are in G major, four are in common metre, and four are in fast tempos. In this way, Irene is exploited as a foil to enhance the tragic stature of Asteria.

In contrast to Asteria, Bajazet is a dynamic character whose rash and impetuous actions set the opera plot in motion. Bajazet is dominated by the two contrasting affections—his unbending pride, and his love for his daughter.<sup>24</sup> His pride compels him to seek revenge for his humiliating defeat and imprisonment by the usurper Tamerlano, but this desire for revenge is tempered by his love for his daughter, who is also a captive of Tamerlano. Although Bajazet does not fear his own death, he fears that the consequences of his actions may endanger the life of his daughter. The conflict between these two affections is

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<sup>23</sup>Excerpts from these two arias are quoted in Wolff, "Italian Opera 1700-1750," pp. 94-95.

<sup>24</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 68.





presented in Bajazet's opening aria "Forte e lieto a morte andrei" in which he tells Andronico that he could march to his death with strength and resolution were it not for his concern for Asteria's safety. These conflicting emotions are depicted musically by the two contrasting themes upon which the aria is constructed. The first consists of short diatonic phrases with dotted rhythms and trills, reminiscent of a French *ouverture*, while the second consists of a single chromatic phrase in slurred groups of two with syncopated rhythms. During the ritornellos, these two phrases are further distinguished by designating the first *forte* and the second *piano*. These two contrasting themes are related by the continuously repeated eighth-notes in the bass which are perhaps intended to represent Bajazet's march to death.

Example 49. *Tamerlano*, "Forte e lieto a morte andrei," meas. 1-4.

The musical score for Example 49 shows the first four measures of the aria "Forte e lieto a morte andrei" from *Tamerlano*. The score is for Violino I, Violino II, Viola, BAJAZET, and Bassi. The tempo is marked "Largo" with a "C" time signature. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score shows the first four measures of the piece. Violino I and II play a diatonic melody with trills and dotted rhythms. Viola plays a similar melody. BAJAZET has a vocal line. Bassi play a continuous eighth-note pattern in the bass.

The first theme is developed by both the voice and the orchestra, while the second remains in the orchestra and is taken up by the voice only during the melismas. Chromaticism in the major mode in the music of Handel is very rare, and in this heroic C major aria, it is specifically exploited in order to depict Bajazet's emotional dilemma.

The other arias present different aspects of these two basic affections. "Ciel e terra armi di sdegno" is a heroic aria in which



Bajazet scornfully rejects Tamerlano's offer of liberty in exchange for his daughter's hand in marriage, while "Empio, per farti guerra" is a vengeance aria in which he curses Tamerlano for his inhumane punishment of Asteria. The violent emotions of the latter aria are emphasized by the diminished sevenths and unison passages of the *furioso* orchestral accompaniment which in turn anticipates the music of the following *scena*. In Act II, Bajazet learns of Asteria's decision to marry Tamerlano, and he reacts not with fury or anger as might be expected from the aria text, but with despair and anguish. His anger is reserved solely for Tamerlano. Although the aria is of the lamenting category, it differs from Asteria's laments in its extremely angular chromatic melodies and its *Andante* tempo.

These four arias of Bajazet are related by two unique musical features which further contribute to the hero's musical characterization. In all four of Bajazet's arias, the voice enters on the cadence of the opening ritornello, and in three of these arias, "with an emphatic word that calls forth its own gesture, followed by a rest."<sup>25</sup> Example 50. *Tamerlano*, "Ciel e terra armi di sdegno," meas. 6-10.



<sup>25</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 158.







Asteria and Tamerlano, and the conglomeration of ariettas and accompanied recitatives which make up his final grand *scena*. The large proportion of free forms employed in Bajazet's music (as opposed to the other characters in the opera) also contributes to his bold and unconventional character. The conflict between Bajazet's desire for revenge upon Tamerlano and his love for his daughter culminates in his death *scena*. The characteristic features of the vengeance and lamenting styles—which have hitherto dominated Bajazet's music—are set in violent opposition as his threats and curses directed at Tamerlano alternate in rapid succession with his words of consolation and farewell addressed to his daughter.

Bajazet's stature as a tragic hero is enhanced by the musical characterization of the other male roles. His adversary Tamerlano is a tyrant similar to Tolomeo in *Giulio Cesare*. Tamerlano's four arias and two duets are characterized by their fast tempos, thin textures, regular forms, and virtuoso coloratura; in addition, five of these six pieces are in the major mode and quadruple metre. All of his arias are composed in a rather rough, unpolished heroic style. Thus, for Tamerlano's attempt to woo Asteria in the aria "Dammi pace, oh volto amato," Handel composed a concerto-like *Allegro* aria in G minor, reminiscent of a vengeance aria, in order to depict his furious desires rather than his tender passions.

In contrast to Tamerlano, Andronico is dominated by amorous affections. Throughout the opera, he languishes over his love for Asteria, but is too indecisive and accommodating to take any positive action to change his unfortunate situation. Although Andronico's music is more varied than that for Tamerlano and Irene—he is given a vengeance







aria and shares in a lamenting duet with Asteria—his character is most perfectly realized in the arias "Benche mi sprezzì" and "Cerco in vano di placare." These arias could be considered the archetype of the Handelian amorous aria. Both arias are triple-metre *Andantes* in E-flat major and are characterized by their conjunct lyrical vocal lines and intricate homophonic accompaniments (see Example 53). Handel gives these arias a high profile in Andronico's role by employing expansive da capo forms and by introducing each aria with an accompanied recitative. The orchestral accompaniments to these recitatives consist of passive sustained chords rather than of the active orchestral figuration found in Bajazet's recitatives. Another interesting detail is that the head motive to the aria "Cerco in vano di placare" is used again as the basis for Andronico's arietta "Nò, che del tuo gran cor." The lyricism of these two arias is evident in Andronico's other arias. Even in Act III, when he finally defies Tamerlano by protesting against his cruel treatment of Asteria, this gentle lyrical quality gives Andronico's aria "Se non mi rendi il mio tesoro" more the effect of a plea rather than of a threat. While Bajazet's coloratura is characterized by its instrumental contours and Tamerlano's by its vocal acrobatics, the coloratura passages in Andronico's arias are distinguished by their ornate and decorative quality (see Example 53). The unheroic role of Andronico appears to be even more unusual because it was conceived for the famous castrato Senesino who, in this opera, was overshadowed musically and dramatically by the tenor Borosini in the role of Bajazet, and by the *prima donna* Cuzzoni in the role of Asteria.



Example 53. *Tamerlano*, "Benche mi sprezzi," meas. 25-31.



### Characterization in Orlando

*Orlando* is one of the few dramatic works by Handel in which the heroine is completely obscured by the hero. Throughout his career, Handel, like Racine, seems to have specialized in creating great female characters. Heroines such as Cleopatra, Asteria, Rodelinda, Fulvia, Alcina, and Romilda in the operas, and Semele, Nitocris, Dejanira, Theodora, Irene, and Iphis in the oratorios are among Handel's most enduring creations. Even in his unsuccessful dramas, Handel seldom failed to bring at least one of the female characters to life. Perhaps one of the reasons for this partiality is that the heroines in *opera seria* were allowed a wider range of emotional expression than the heroes. The heroines received a larger portion of those arias with strong emotional content, such as the laments. However, in *Orlando*, the hero is permitted an extensive range of emotional expression because of his madness, and this inspired Handel to create his most remarkable castrato role. Like Bajazet, Orlando is the dynamic character about whose actions the plot revolves.



In his introductory arietta "Stimolato dalla gloria, agitato dall'amore," Orlando is presented as the confused hero torn between the conflicting ambitions of love and glory. This inner conflict is portrayed in the accompanied recitative "Imagini funeste, che turbate quest'alma," which concludes with Orlando's resolution to follow the path of love rather than glory. In the subsequent aria "Non fù già men forte Alcide," Orlando attempts to support his decision by citing examples of the amorous heroes from antiquity. Although this piece is a *cantabile* love aria in *Andante* tempo and 6/8 metre, the addition of two horns gives the aria a distinctly heroic nuance. The heroic aspects of Orlando's character are fully asserted in the accompanied recitative "Itene pur tremendo" in which he rescues a distressed princess from assailants. They also are present in his second aria "Fammi combattere mostri e tifei," in which he boasts of the illustrious deeds he will undertake in order to prove his love for Angelica. This *Allegro* aria in B-flat major and quadruple metre is an excellent example of the Handelian heroic coloratura aria. The aria's second theme, a rising fanfare motive set in imitation generates an extraordinary impression of power and energy appropriate to Orlando's character. In spite of Orlando's resolution to follow love's calling, at the end of Act I, he emerges as a truly heroic figure worthy of the hero of Ariosto's epic poem. Perhaps Handel wanted to emphasize Orlando's heroic qualities to prepare his fall into madness as an even more startling development.

In Act II, Orlando goes insane with jealousy when he learns from Dorinda of Angelica's betrayal. The discovery of the secret love affair between Angelica and Medoro also effects Dorinda, because she is in love with Medoro. At this point in the opera, both characters are given love



laments, although Handel sets these arias in sharp contrast in order to depict the individual emotions of these two characters. The idea of contrast is suggested in the texts: Dorinda's lamenting arietta and subsequent aria employ pastoral imagery, while Orlando's lament is introduced by a recitative in which he declares his desire for revenge. Thus the shepherdess Dorinda expresses her grief in a *pastorale* arietta and then in a *siciliano* aria, while Orlando expresses his grief in an *Allegro* rage aria. The *furioso* style of Orlando's aria is not only consistent with his character, but cleverly anticipates the onslaught of madness.

The madness of Orlando is fully realized in the finale to Act II which serves as the musical/dramatic climax to the opera. When he was setting this libretto, Handel realized that this scene required something extraordinary. Vivaldi was confronted with a similar challenge when he set Braccioli's version of the Orlando story.<sup>26</sup> Both composers succeeded in their goals, but their results are very different. Vivaldi set the three mad scenes in Braccioli's *Orlando* as simple recitative, although the recitative is simple only because of its continuo accompaniment. Instead of the *secco* style of the eighteenth century, Vivaldi revived the affective style of seventeenth-century recitative. The unusual modulations and chromaticisms and the numerous arioso passages recall the impassioned recitatives in Monteverdi's late operas. Only in a few important passages is the orchestra introduced either to accompany the voice or to provide independent figuration. While Vivaldi's setting of Orlando's madness looks back to Monteverdi and Cavalli, Handel's seems to look ahead to Gluck and Mozart. Handel conceived his

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<sup>26</sup> See the recording Antonio Vivaldi, *Orlando Furioso* (Erato STU 71138).





*scena* as a single, large-scale symphonic structure. The *scena*'s unusual form and structure is worthy of analysis.

The *scena* consists of an accompanied recitative of sixty-two measures followed by an expansive rondeau aria of 137 measures. The *scena* begins when Orlando's insane attempt to pursue and punish Angelica for her infidelity is prevented by a cloud machine which descends and carries her off to safety. A strange measured passage for the continuo which accompanies this scenic display serves as a transition between the simple recitative and the *scena*. The accompanied recitative can be divided into five sections according to the ideas presented by the text. In the first section, Orlando curses the spirits for preventing his righteous revenge. His anger is depicted by the *concitato* arpeggio figuration that the orchestra interpolates between the unaccompanied phrases of the voice. Then Orlando laments his betrayal by Angelica in the arioso passage "Ah! misero e schernito;" the tempo changes to *Andante*, and the orchestra plays reiterated chords syncopated across the bar line upon a descending chromatic bass.

Example 54. *Orlando*, "Ah! misero e schernito," meas. 1-5.

*Andante.*

de-te? Ah! mi-se-ro e scherni-to, l'in-gra-ta già m'ha uc-ci-so! So-no lo spir-to mio da me di-

In his madness, Orlando imagines that he is dead, and that he crosses the River Styx into Hades. This passage of dissonant sustained



*accompagnato* is interrupted by two passages for unison orchestra in 5/8 metre.

Example 55. *Orlando*, "Mad Scena," the use of 5/8 metre.

The musical score for Example 55 is written for voice and orchestra. It begins with a recitative section in 5/8 time, marked with a common time signature. The vocal line is in C minor, and the orchestra provides accompaniment. The lyrics are in Italian: "do, gliò! Ec-co la sti-già bar-ca, di Ca-ron-te a di-spet-to già sol-co l'on-de,". The score then transitions to an *Andante* section, also in 5/8 time, marked with a common time signature. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "già sol-co l'on-de,". The orchestra provides accompaniment in the *Andante* section.

These passages have received much attention because they are perhaps the first known examples of quintuple time signature in Western music.

According to Burney:

Handel has endeavored to describe the hero's perturbation of intellect by fragments of symphony in 5/8, a division of time which can only be borne in such a situation.<sup>27</sup>

Into this extended accompanied recitative is inserted an *Andante* arietta in C minor and 6/8 metre wherein Orlando envisions himself being tormented by the furies. The struggle between Orlando and the furies is depicted by the descending scale passages of the unison orchestra and voice and the short, repetitious melodic phrases (see Example 57). The arietta cadences unexpectedly in the relative major and is followed directly by an accompanied recitative beginning in C major. In this final section of the introductory recitative, Orlando searches for his rival Medoro, only to find him shielded in the arms of Proserpina, who was probably intended to symbolize Angelica.

<sup>27</sup>Burney, *A General History of Music*, p. 778.



Proserpina weeps, and Orlando's fury is temporarily abated. The effect of Proserpina's tears upon Orlando's rage is depicted musically by juxtaposing a *forte* cadence in G major for full orchestra with a reiterated chord of E major in the upper strings marked *piano* and *Adagio*.

In a twelve-measure melody in F major designated *A tempo di gavotta*, Orlando comforts Proserpina (see Example 57). This completely unexpected melody, which Burney found disappointing because one always "expects the key to be D minor," becomes the refrain to an extended rondeau aria.<sup>28</sup> The return of this unusual dance air, addressed to Angelica through the person of Proserpina and amid these tragic surroundings, has a strange, almost sardonic effect akin to the recurrence of the *idée fixe* in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. The first episode of this rondeau is a D minor *Larghetto* lament upon a chromatic ground bass which serves as the musical centrepiece of the *scena*. Although the ground bass aria was a common feature of Italian opera from the middle of the seventeenth century, it was extremely rare in *opera seria*. In this lament, Handel demonstrated that he could equal the masters of the seventeenth century in the skillful treatment of this obsolete technique. The ground is four measures long, but every second repetition is displaced down an octave, creating a long descending line which is repeated four times (see Example 56). Like the recurring gavotte air, the ostinato bass could also be interpreted as an *idée fixe*. The affecting vocal melody which unfolds above this ground bass is accompanied by a chromatic counter-melody played by the violins in the high register (see Example 56). After the return of the F major

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<sup>28</sup>Burney, *A General History of Music*, p. 778.





Example 56. *Orlando*, "Che del pianto ancor nel regno," meas. 10-25.

dance air, Orlando resolves to be harsh and unmerciful to Proserpina (Angelica) and Medoro in the arietta "Mà sì, sì pupille, sì, piangete." In this arietta (which serves as the second episode of the rondeau aria), Orlando's anger is depicted by the rapid ascending scale passages in the violins. On the final return of the theme, the text of the previous arietta is repeated to the gavotte melody creating an interesting contradiction between the music and text. The *scena* concludes with an extended orchestral coda which develops material from the last two sections of the rondeau. The rapid scale passages derived from the arietta depict the magician Zoroastro "as he drives off through the air in his chariot grasping Orlando's body in his arms."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup>English translation of the libretto accompanying the recording of Handel's *Orlando*.





In spite of the violent musical contrasts which at times threaten to break the *scena* into musical anarchy, the *scena* has its own very convincing organic structure. The numerous sections are unified in a variety of subtle ways: the descending chromatic bass line in "Ah! misero e schernito" anticipates the chromatic ground bass of the lament (see Examples 54 and 56); the descending five-note scale passage which recurs throughout the arietta "Già latra Cerbero" returns as the head motive to the gavotte air—this motive is first suggested in the passages for unison orchestra in 5/8 metre—(see Example 57); the recurring gavotte air serves as the refrain to the rondeau aria; and the material from the final two episodes of the rondeau aria is developed in the orchestral coda. The unusual form of this *scena* and the unpredictable harmonies, melodies, and rhythms are skillfully utilized for the purpose of depicting the hero's deranged state of mind.

Example 57. *Orlando*, "Già latra Cerbero" and "Vaghe pupille," thematic relationships.

The image displays two musical excerpts side-by-side. The left excerpt is for a vocal solo, featuring a descending chromatic line in the bass. The right excerpt is for a unison violin, marked 'A tempo di Gavotta' and 'Viol. unis., piano', featuring a descending five-note scale passage. Both excerpts share a common rhythmic and melodic motif.

**Left Excerpt (Vocal):**

o-gni ter-ri-bi-le squa-li-da fu-ri-a

**Right Excerpt (Viol. unis., piano):**

A tempo di Gavotta.

Va - ghe pu - pil - le, nò, non pian - ge - te, nò,

Act III seems to stand in the shadow of this imposing *scena*. During the Act, Orlando's madness causes him to be transformed from a great hero into an evil power threatening "to destroy the happiness of



all around him."<sup>30</sup> As in the grand *scena*, this madness is reflected in the unusual form and content of Orlando's music. In contrast to the regularity of Orlando's first three da capo arias, his three arias and two duets in Act III are characterized by their extreme irregularity. His duet with Dorinda, "Unisca amor in noi" and his aria "Per far, mia deletta" are interrupted by the dramatic action, while his duet with Angelica "Finchè prendi ancor il sangue" and his aria "Già l'ebro mio ciglio" are through-composed, dramatically-conceived pieces. Contrasting affections are juxtaposed, and ritornello structures are altered in the aria "Già lo stringo" and the two duets, while the orchestration and tonal structures are modified in the arias "Già lo stringo" and "Già l'ebro mio ciglio."

Orlando finally regains his senses at the end of the opera through the supernatural intervention of Zoroastro. When he realizes the effects of his destructive actions, he is overcome with remorse and attempts to commit suicide in the aria "Per far, mia deletta." His suicide is prevented by Angelica who risks facing Orlando's wrath a second time. Her magnanimous gesture compels Orlando to forgive Angelica and to offer his blessing to the couple. By this act of forgiveness, Orlando overcomes his amorous self-indulgence and returns to his former heroic state. This return to glory is proclaimed in the accompanied recitative "Vinse incauti, battaglie, e fieri mostri" which recalls his heroic *accompagnato* in Act I. Thus, musically and dramatically, Orlando's dynamic character has come full circle.

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<sup>30</sup>Dean, "*Orlando*: One of the Masterpieces of the 18th Century Theater."



Orlando is counterbalanced by the magician Zoroastro, a part conceived for the *basso* Montagnana. In this opera, therefore, both the *prima donna* and *seconda donna* are eclipsed not only by the *primo uomo*, but also by the *basso* who in *opera seria* was traditionally restricted to singing stereotyped villain roles. Zoroastro receives fewer arias than the other characters, as was the custom in *opera seria*, and thus his important position in the opera is created solely by the quality of music Handel allotted to him. Like most of Handel's bass roles, Zoroastro receives one aria in each act. In his first aria, "Lascia Amor, e siegui Marte," he admonishes Orlando to abandon his amorous dalliance and resume his glorious conquests, while in his second and third arias, "Tra caligini profonde" and "Sorge infausta una procella," he comments upon the action through poetic similes. Although these aria situations are not very dramatic, Handel was inspired by the supernatural god-like aspects of Zoroastro's character.

All three arias are set in the grand heroic style. They are characterized by fast tempo, virtuoso coloratura, strong contrapuntal texture, extensive thematic development, and concerto-like interaction between the voice and orchestra. These three arias are uniformly scored for an orchestra of strings, oboes, and bassoons, and employ *tutti/solo* contrasts; in two of the arias, the oboes are given obbligato parts. In Zoroastro's arias, Handel exploited the wide range and rich sonority of Montagnana's extraordinary bass voice, and this feature greatly contributes to the magician's powerful and awe-inspiring character. Passages such as the final phrase in the first section of "Tra caligini profonde"—with its octave-and-a-half plunge to a sustained



low A followed by the cadential phrase conspicuous for its downward leap of a twelfth—illustrates the way in which this unusual vocal style creates a sense of strength and power.

Example 58. *Orlando*, "Tra caligini profonde," meas. 71-80.

The musical score for Example 58, measures 71-80 of "Orlando", is presented in a single system. It consists of a vocal line (soprano) and a basso continuo line (bass). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line begins with a downward leap of a twelfth in measure 71, which is highlighted by the text. The basso continuo line also features a downward leap of a twelfth in measure 71. The lyrics are: "fon - de, s'ha per gui, da un cie co Nu me." The score ends with a "Tutti" marking and a forte dynamic.

This is one of the instances where Handel, like Mozart, was able to exploit the peculiar talents of an individual singer for the purpose of characterization.

Zoroastro's character is further depicted through the three accompanied recitatives which balance his three arias. All three recitatives are employed in scenes of incantation and convey a "wild grandeur . . . of a very uncommon kind," to use the word of Burney, well suited to the magician-priest.<sup>31</sup> The most unusual of these recitatives is "Gieroglifici eterni!" in which Zoroastro contemplates the movements of the stars. This piece, written in a fluid mixture of recitative and arioso styles, serves as a "vivid evocation of the scene described in the stage directions."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Burney, *A General History of Music*, p. 777.

<sup>32</sup>Dean, "Orlando: One of the Masterpieces of the 18th Century Theater."





Throughout the opera, Zoroastro is seen dramatically and musically as a character set in splendid isolation who, like a demigod, oversees the actions of the mortal characters, intervening only in extreme situations. This isolation is enhanced by the sumptuous, solemn, and consistent music of his role. The objective stability of Zoroastro's character and music balances and contrasts well with the subjective instability of Orlando's character and music. The interesting relationship between Zoroastro and Orlando is aptly summarized in the imagery of the aria texts to Zoroastro's second and third arias: the light of reason (Zoroastro) "in deep and smoky darkness" (Orlando), and the "star of good omen" (Zoroastro) in the "threatening storm" (Orlando).<sup>33</sup> On a symbolic level, Zoroastro can be seen as the benevolent force which neutralizes the destructive tendencies unleashed when Orlando's great power was corrupted by his insanity, and allows this power to return to its former constructive state.

As in *Tamerlano*, the other characters in this opera—Angelica, Medoro, and Dorinda—serve as foils for the two main protagonists. Because the opera takes place in a pastoral setting and Dorinda is a shepherdess, these characters are given a large proportion of pastoral music. For example, Medoro's "Verdi allori, sempre unito" and "Vorrei poterti amar" and Dorinda's "Se mi rivolgo al prato" are *siciliano* arias, and Dorinda's "Quando spieghi i tuoi tormenti" is a *pastorale* arietta. Handel even enforces the *pastorale* upon the accompanied recitative in Dorinda's "Quanto diletto avea tra questi boschi"; the

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<sup>33</sup>English translation of the libretto accompanying the recording of Handel's *Orlando*.



declamatory vocal line is continually broken up by lilting orchestral interludes derived from the opening ritornello; the effect of compound metre in this recitative is created by the continuous triplets in the violins. The frequent pictorial imagery of the aria texts caused the composer to indulge in word-painting; the nightingale in "Quando spieghi i tuoi tormenti," the whirlwind in "Amor è qual vento," and the stream and dark clouds in "Verdi piante, erbette liete" are excellent examples of Handel's depiction of natural phenomena.

But it would be inaccurate to dismiss all the arias of these characters as mere nature pieces devoid of any dramatic substance. Dorinda's "Quando spieghi i tuoi tormenti" and "Se mi rivolgo al prato" are admirable portraits of pastoral grief. In Medoro's "Se il cor mai tu dirà," the Doctrine of the Affections is manipulated so as to create a dramatic contradiction between the text and music. In this aria, Medoro tries to conceal his secret love for Angelica by telling Dorinda that he will always be faithful to her. This consoling text is set as a slow chromatic aria in A minor which seems to suggest the remorse Medoro feels for his deception of Dorinda. In general, however, the music of Angelica, Medoro, and Dorinda serves as a pastoral background for the great symbolic struggle between reason and reality and insanity and illusion which is represented by the characters of Zoroastro and Orlando.



## CONCLUSION

In this thesis the author has attempted to place Handel's operas into a proper musical/historical perspective. When seen as part of a broad contemporary musical development, one realizes how closely the composer followed the operatic conventions of his day. Handel's treatment of the forms of *opera seria* does not appear to be radically different from his contemporaries. The majority of the dramatic action in Handel's operas takes place in the simple recitative which was composed in the restrained declamatory style that was later termed *secco*. Because the London audiences did not understand Italian, the passages of simple recitative are not as extensive as in the operas of Handel's Continental contemporaries. In scenes of intense drama, such as soliloquies, monologues, and pronouncements, the restrained simple recitative is replaced by the more affective accompanied recitative. The main musical element in Handel's operas, as in the operas of his contemporaries, is the da capo aria. Only on occasion are the da capo arias replaced by arias in other forms, the most important being the arietta. By the time Handel had begun his career as a composer of Italian opera, the form of the da capo aria had become highly standardized, and Handel adopted this form with only slight modification. The basic elements of form—tonal structure, text-setting, development, and orchestration—are very predictable and appear to be derived from contemporary models. Each aria consists of two sections of which the



first is repeated at the end of the second. The first section is organized into binary form and contains two settings of the aria's first strophe separated by an intermediate orchestral ritornello. A modulation occurs at the end of the first text setting—to the dominant in arias in the major mode and to the relative major in arias in the minor mode. This section is framed by orchestral ritornellos which present the basic thematic material of the aria. In contrast to the first section, the second section is shorter and less organized and serves as a transition between the expansive first section and its da capo repeat. Instead of remaining in a single tonality, this section is modulatory—either beginning in the submediant and modulating to the mediant in arias in the major mode, or beginning in the relative major and modulating to the dominant in arias in the minor mode.

The examples of formal modification and manipulation in Handel's da capo arias, as in the other forms, cannot be regarded as unique because most of these irregularities can be found in the operas of his contemporaries and were often determined or suggested by the libretti. These irregular forms are perhaps more common in Handel's operas because he favored setting older libretti from the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries; these libretti tended to be less rigid in their formal structure than the Metastasian libretti favored by his contemporaries. Therefore, one is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that

the sole novelty in Handel's opera arias was their genius: on the one hand the quality of his invention, on the other his ability to use a borrowed or commonplace formula to achieve an exceptional effect. While nearly all great artists possess this faculty, it lies at the heart of Handel's creative procedure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 157.





This superb musical invention and skillful treatment of commonplace formulas is primarily utilized in the portrayal of human emotion. Because the dramatic action in *opera seria* is conveyed through the musically unimportant recitative, the fundamental goal of the music in Handel's operas is the depiction of the emotional states or affects within the contemplative arias. The Doctrine of the Affections provided the composer with the commonplace formulas and the basic patterns for highlighting the affective content of the arias. The arias in Handel's operas can be divided into three categories according to the basic affection of the aria text and its corresponding musical style; these three affective categories are sorrow, heroism, and love. However, this abstract intellectual framework could only be transformed into viable portraits of human emotion, replete with the appropriate depth and shading, through the high quality of Handel's musical invention. The emotions expressed through these arias are universal and timeless, in keeping with the Classical principles of the Augustinian Age. At the same time, these emotions have a pronounced individuality and are capable of conveying personality and character. It is remarkable that although these operas are generally conventional in their formal structure, within these rigid forms Handel was able to depict human emotion and characterization with an intensity which clearly anticipates the mature masterpieces of Mozart and Verdi.



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